INTRODUCTION

Religious fundamentalism as a term has been applied to various types of development that hold religious and political dimensions. Fundamentalists are also known as unsophisticated protesters in a world that is evolving at a very fast rate.

Fundamentalism could be regarded as an effort put up by the interpreters of religion, mostly those who believe in traditional original beliefs, values and behavior. The forces of social change have a major role to play in the emergence of fundamentalism. Changes are an inevitable fact of our life. Any sort of change will lead to a little confusion and disturbance in order. So whenever any change comes up in our society, a little chaos or disturbance in our regular community life is always expected as a result of it.

The fundamentalist are of the view that this change shall lead to the loss of our identities and eventually our original roots of belonging. The fundamentalists also offer to restore the lost values and culture and strive to bring back the past which they claim is much better than the modern society we have at present. In order to achieve this claim, fundamentalists evolve a panoramic and absolutist belief system and practices which is very liable to very little changes because of its rigid nature. This belief system is has the capability to bring excruciating commitment among its followers.

Fundamentalism today, has a very high attachment with violence. It takes on a very violent, tempestuous and aggressive form. It justifies killing and terrorism. It justifies the very act of hurting someone else on the pretext of saving one’s own culture and religious beliefs. Our country India has seen an increase in the religious intolerance after independence. Attempts are made to debilitating the religious harmony of India and deliberate attempts are also made to encourage and intensify the growth religious differences among different religious communities in order to disrupt peace and harmony of the nation. We could chalk out many reasons for this. One could be the electoral practice in India. This practice encourages the formation of vote banks. This so called vote bank is nurtured on the basis of caste and religions. The other reason could be the rise in the number of claimants to the gains of the nation’s economy. Political mobilization on religious and caste lines is needed if we are to increase the share. This results in one’s religious or caste identity being more emphasized than one’s national identity. Hence devotion towards one’s caste and religion is higher than that towards the nation leading to loss in national unity and solidarity.

The fundamentalists are ethnocentric. They tend to go against anything that challenges their religion and religious group’s interpretations and opinions. Fundamentalism as a term usually has a religious connotation that indicates a serious, intense and steady attachment to a set of beliefs that cannot be transformed or changed. Fundamentalism is applied on a broader context among certain religious groups although not exclusively. This tendency is most of the times characterized by a remarkable strict literalism as applied to certain dogmas, specific scriptures,
or ideologies. There is also a very strong sense of the importance of maintaining distinctions and differences between in group and out group, with notions of purity being of great importance. There is also a desire to return to their older traditional forms. These previous form is considered to be ideal. It believes that the members have already forgotten these forms and it is their duty to take them back to where they belong. This tendency results in accepting no other opinions than their own as applied to these established “fundamentals” and the acceptance of their interpretation within the group.

ORIGIN OF THE TERM ‘FUNDAMENTALISM’

The origin of the term Fundamentalism dates back to 1910. It was coined from articles that were written by American Protestant Christian authors. These articles were published in twelve volumes entitled The Fundamentals by the Stewart brothers- Lyman and Milton Stewart. The most important goal of these writings was to protect and shelter the unerring nature of the bible. This literary work also aimed at criticizing the European higher criticisms that was examining the scriptures from the perspectives of philology, anthropology and archaeology. Later in the 1990’s, around 3 million copies of The Fundamentals were distributed for free amongst protestant pastors, evangelist and American theology students.

The fundamentalist movement was trying to shield the narrow boundaries of the conservative Christian orthodoxy. While doing so, the fundamentalism movement came into association with the return of the Christ to the Earth, intense patriotism, and traditional ways of living along with traditional values. It also started neglecting intellectualism. Changes came in the 20th century as a result of modernization that was taking place then. This change affected the society as a whole. The society underwent changes in terms of thinking in every sphere. As a result of this change, they were more liberal and open in attitude towards norms, education, sex and entertainment. When these changes started taking place in a rapid manner, the fundamentalist could not just sit back and watch. Thus in response to this change in culture the fundamentalist who had actually retired from participation in public policies and politics came back to the public arena.

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

The history of Islamic fundamentalism goes back to 1928. In 1928, Hassan al Banna established the Islamic organization called ‘Ikwan al Muslimin’ or the society of Muslim brothers in Egypt.
Islamic fundamentalism started from this time onwards. By 1930, it had spread in Lebanon and Syria too. However, it was at the time of the Iranian revolution of 1979 that the Islamic fundamentalism flourished in the west when the first supreme leader of Iran, A.R. Kaomeini made an attempt to apply the Sharia across all the institutions in the country. Sharia is the religious laws based on Quran that all Muslims must follow. Some observers believe that Islamic fundamentalism was a combination of two things – the religion and the state. They also observe that it highlights patriarchy. They are of the view that Islamic fundamentalism promotes a pan-Islam that has to be publicized in foreign nations. This is to be done so that an ideal community of followers of Islam with similar interest and thoughts is created.

We might construe from these observations that it has no tolerance for other religion. They believe in the supremacy and universality of Islam. It denies rationalism and historicism. It also reflects detest towards freedom, democracy and secularization. The Islamic fundamentalist movement started in Egypt, Lebanon, Sudan and Indonesia but by the early 21st century they could be found everywhere in different forms in similar fundamentalist phenomena in other societies and other religions.

**GLOBAL FUNDAMENTALISM**

In the present era, we are experiencing global fundamentalism everywhere. It is a representation of many different socio political movements who share some common features in their response to a common globalization process. This common globalization process is characterized as secularization. Alongside, the globalization process, two developments that are connected are also taking place. Firstly, the separation of religion from other institutions is taking place. Secondly, the world is now being characterized by the various nations’ economic dependency on other nations through transnational corporations.

There is one common feature of all fundamentalist movements across the world. This characteristic is their resistance to the process of institutional differentiation. It is through this
process of differentiations of institutes by which beliefs and faith are pushed to the periphery of the modern contemporary society. This is then interpreted as the marginalization of religion.

If we consider a global definition of fundamentalism, it is seen as ‘a proclamation of reclaimed authority over a sacred tradition which is to be reinstated as an antidote for a society perceived to have strayed from its cultural moorings’. The reclamation of authority being mentioned here has two dimensions. Firstly we can see that because of modernization there is repulse of the difference between sacred and secular. The second one is the need of a plan in order to de-differentiate the separation of institutions so that the centre stage is allotted to religion.

Various ethnic – racial traditions, different levels of economic development and geo politics may bring up different forms of global fundamentalism. However, they are just the local versions of the same phenomenon that is happening across the globe. We can take the example of the case of Soka Gakkai or the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism and the post second world war neo nationalist Shinto social movement or Misokua of contemporary Japan. A proper understanding of these two movements reveals that the nature of both of these movements is religious. They have a religious base. These movements also tend to seek direct involvement in politics proving a political inclination. There is also a presence of transformation of values of their society. Moreover they promote spiritual as well as racial unity and togetherness. There is intense patriotism amongst its members. This patriotism sometimes goes up to the extent of fanatic patriotism.

THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF A FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENT:

There are four dimensions of a fundamentalist movement. The four dimensions are:

1. PROCLAMATION
2. MYTHOS
3. CONTINUITIES
4. MODERN MEANS

PROCLAMATION:

The leader always makes it a point to promulgate that the original religious beliefs and values are to be preserved as well as followed. Those lost traditions are to be restored and returned to. There is always a proclamation by the leader asking people to preserve their traditions and values and return to the lost ones.

MYTHOS:

There must always be a mythos as to what led to the present undesirable situation. It could be the break down or corruption in moral values. A fundamentalist movement must have an ideology, theory or myths.

CONTINUITIES:

Clear continuities must be drawn between the traditions lost and the movement as the solution for restoration of the same.
MODERN MEANS:

While the above mentioned changes are to be brought, the same is to done through or with the help of modern means whether educational or military. Thus we can find an irony that by justifying that they want to restore the lost tradition they are basically trying to create a new social order. We can observe the modernity of most variations of fundamentalism in two phenomenons that its use of science and violence as means to reach its end.

FUNDAMENTALISM AND SCIENCE

We would be wrong if we addressed fundamentalism as being anti scientific, instead it would be more than correct to call them 'pragmatically selective' in the kind of science they use in their aim to create a theological society. They do not reject science but use in on their own terms. The members are willing to use and employ the creation of science in order to reclaim the society which they think is now in an undesirable state.

A decade after the Fundamentalist was first published; religious fundamentalism that rejected science and intellectualism was established. In 1925, the undisputable watershed event in the US took place; it was the trial of John T. Scopes in Dayton.

He was an instructor in a school on a temporary basis. He taught shortly from a text that featured the evolutionary growth of man. It was seen that in doing so he had violated some law that forbids mentioning any theory that rejects the story of the 'Divine creation of man'. He was sent for trial for violating this law and this trial came to be known as the monkey trial. The fundamentalists had a brief victory and Scopes was convicted. However, H. L. Mencken an editor of a newspaper personally started covering all the trails and proceedings and succeeded in showing that the fundamentalist and their attorney were basically nothing but cultural backwaters of America. He said that they were showing their small town and zero knowledge in contrast to reasoning, modernity and progress. After this incident, the fundamentalist withdrew for a short time but again came back with an educational milieu focusing on the bible and its eternal truth. By 1950 there were more than 100 bible colleges and schools.
When the world war began, the fundamentalist changed their stance and believed that modern science would be compatible with the bible if one interpreted it correctly. Science and its creation thus became a bridge between the fundamentalist and modernity. Some of the groups also came up for a short while called the Religion and Science Association; Seventh Day Adventist based society for the Study of Deluge Geology and related Science. These groups kept alive the flame of the reconciliation of religion and science. One such institute that has made far is the Creation Science Institute, San Diego. The CSI is funded by individual and church contributions and also from their own publishing and journal subscriptions.

Recently, the idea of intelligent design has come up as a rival to the Darwinian theory of natural selection. Intelligent design says that the complexity of living things show that they must have been created by some higher force. What that higher force is, is still unexplained. Fundamentalist in recent times accept the evolution of man as a possible theory. So in this debate of evolution versus creation, protestant Christian fundamentalist have attempted to combine facts and patters so as to fit their presuppositions instead of experimenting or testing. This in some way shows that the fundamentalists adopt science in both creative and derivative manner. In the same way, the use of video tapes of beheadings, anti western pronouncements by Osama bin Laden and western prisoners taken by guerrilla groups were sent to the Muslim broadcasting channels like Al-Jazeera especially for the Muslim audiences. In fact the recent concerns regarding the potential or Iran to develop nuclear energy reserved and the desire to see the end of Israel made by the president of Iran Ahmandinejad are also some instances. Hence we can see that religious fundamentalism does not only seek symbolic victories but also power.

FUNDAMENTALISM AND VIOLENCE

Institutional differentiations leads to the compartmentalization of religion and is accompanied by the high rate of cultural diversity. This diversity is through immigration, employment, high speed communication and sometimes due to the loss of freedom in one’s own country. The fundamentalist movements are hence seen a remedy to shelter one’s tradition and values. They consider themselves to be lacking behind in a world that is continuously threatening them and these secularist desire them to be destroyed. Hence it doesn’t take much for this to be transformed to violence from verbal protests. Violence is used as a tool for reclaims their sacred values. It has nowadays become not an option but most probable strategy.

Thus violence was used as a tool by Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran against the Christian west and the other Muslim who didn’t follow the Islamic revolution. He killed thousands of men during the 1980’s. In 1979, he urged more than 200 Iranian pilgrims to participate in the Hajj to the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. There they killed thousands of worshippers with smuggled automatic weapons. Other examples of violence are the Sikh fundamentalist extremists’ assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984, the Tibetans exile in India, the terrorists 9/11 attack at twin towers in the USA and the 26/11 attack in India.
CONCLUSION

The height that the globalization culture reaches eventually is the actual cause of global fundamentalism. The world system based on its interdependency with other nations never evolves successfully because if we work towards this aim the traditional values, religion and norms are at stake and being threatened. Secular globalization is self limiting. New technologies and high speed communication do not create similar identity instead leads to a desire for a separate identity and preservation of one’s own culture in this rapidly evolving society. All nations are not equal in resources or religion. Hence not all faith considers the other faith equal or same. So it ultimately leads to some kind of conflict. However both globalization and fundamentalism are two sides of the same coin.

REFERENCES


