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## Political use of religion

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had outbidden other rulers in declaring Islam as the state religion.

The Awami League had in the late nineties its own stint in power, but failed to show its courage of conviction in relation to secularism and did not take any move to restore it to the constitution. This, however, was understandable. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its companion, the Jamaat-e-Islami, had taken to the using of religion for electoral success in a manner which obliged the Awami League to turn to religion, even if reluctantly. Madrasha education, which has proved to be an easy breeding ground for terrorist outfits has been promoted by both parties almost on a competitive basis with the intention of getting votes.

Capitalism is not religious, either in its character or its conduct, but it makes free of religion to face its arch-enemy, communism. The story of the rise of the Taliban is well-known. The Americans nurtured them with arms and madrasha education to fight the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. With the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Afghanistan and the disintegration of Soviet Union itself the Taliban needed an enemy for their sustenance, and they have found it in the Capitalists. Ideologically, the Taliban are not anti-capitalist; far from it, they believe in capitalism, ideologically speaking. But what they find themselves up against is the secular dispensation of capitalism, which they feel inclined to call crass materialism.

The Pakistani military rulers had been, with American aid generously given and received, warmly hospitable to the nurturing of the Taliban in Pakistani madrashas. But now that the monster has come out of the bottle, the

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ruling class in Pakistan is finding it painfully difficult to put up with it, let alone control it. Meanwhile, the people in the outlying areas have become exposed to American bombing on the plea of killing the terrorists.

Israel does not have to make use of religion for political purposes, for it is, by definition, a religious state; in fact the only religious state in the modern world worthy of that name. Its occupation of the land belonging to the Palestinians, in which action it is being fully backed by the USA and the members of the Jewish community all over the world, has taken on a religious character -- for it is an organised Zionist state which is seeking to destroy the prospects of the setting up of a Palestinian nationalist state. Among the Palestinians there are Christians as well, and indeed when Palestinian Resistance Movement began to work its leadership included well-known Christians. The resistance

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Of all the states in the Arab world, Iraq used to be the most secular. Thanks to George Bush's crusade, Iraq has been torn to pieces, with the Shias and Sunnis killing each other on a daily basis. The invaders were Christians, they had declared themselves to be so, and therefore, not unexpectedly, the Iraqi resistance has taken on a religious character. Like the Taliban, the Al

Quida was once promoted by the USA, because of its anti-communist stance, and is now fighting its mentor, in the absence of the enemy it was once set up to fight.

Iran's revolution could and should have been led by the leftists. Indeed they were the leading force behind the overthrowing of the Shah, the mighty emperor who was god-like in his assumptions. The leftists failed to take over state power and the capitalist world was not particularly unhappy to see that the worst had not happened. In their perception, the Islamic fundamentalists were bad enough, but not as evil as the communists. Yet Iran has now become an enemy because its rulers are a threat to the supremacy of Israel in the Middle East.

The rise of fundamentalism threatening the secular structure of the state in Turkey and Algeria is not so much due to the strength of fundamentalism as to the weakness of the capitalism put

into practice by the rulers. The Turks and the Algerians are dissatisfied; they have their grievances which they could have ventilated had the leftists been allowed to function. But since the left has been and is being persecuted, people have turned to the right, and what has happened in Iran may not be unlikely to happen in Algeria and Turkey too.

In Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Somalia, tribal rivalry has been forced to take on a religious character by the interference of the capitalist world who want the strife to continue in the interest of its own economic and political hegemony.

Some of the catholic priests in Latin America have set up an example of going against capitalist aggression. As is to be expected, they do not have the approval of the Vatican in this political stand.

Thus to the political use of religion has had not one but many faces, and all the faces had been connected with the question of power. Alongside the abuses, religion in politics has helped anti-imperialist resistance. But the victim has always been secularism. Secularism does not necessarily ensure democracy; but it is impossible to have democracy without secularism. With the disintegration of the USSR, secularism has suffered a setback and religious fundamentalism has become more rampant than it was before. But the real villain of the piece is capitalism itself which promotes fundamentalism by breeding inequality, poverty and discontent, and at the same time uses religion to hide its designs of material exploitation.

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