

A new line was crossed

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The time is ripe for our political elites to rise to the occasion and collectively unite in their hatred for such evil



Silence may not be an option in the face of extremism Photo- REUTERS

The 13th century Italian poet Dante once uttered a profound note of caution by stating: “The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis.” After witnessing the brutal massacre of 132 children in the city of Peshawar in Pakistan by Taliban on December 16, 2014, a similar chord was touched in the entire civilised world where no room is left for being a neutral observer to this overall ordeal.

The truth is, the mass murder that we witnessed, and the brutality that was exhibited collectively make us believe that a new line of immoral conduct was crossed in Peshawar to which we cannot be silent. In essence, there was an Islamic State-like savagery that was imported from Syria and Iraq to Pakistan to deliver a strong political message by Taliban to all its opponents in South Asia. But, have we deciphered that message yet?

Or more bluntly, is our political elite ready to see that a peaceful social order within our political space cannot and should not accommodate such vicious entities irrespective of their political strength?

There is no doubt that the Islamic radicalism and terrorism that we witness in South Asia is a manifestation of opportunistic political entities who have, time after time, patronised radical

supporters of political Islam.

The history of our political space in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan has witnessed far too many dictators and political parties who have endorsed radical religious philosophy to earn cheap legitimacy and support for facilitating their existence.

But, can we use this loss that the mothers and fathers have experienced in Peshawar to collectively unite against such a political idea? Is it possible for pragmatic political elements to draw a new line against such radical political groups that they will collectively never cross in the name of coalitions and electoral politics?

As citizens, we are often dumbfounded when we see pragmatic political entities dancing to the tune of Islamists or Hindu radicals when elections are on their door steps, but such a dangerous political attitude often had grave consequences.

That is, by strategically interacting with such extremist groups, the political elements from the centre-right and centre-left ideological continuum have explicitly given their views and philosophical standing support and legitimacy within our overall societal periphery.

Thus, the barbaric incident in Peshawar should compel our political elites to rethink their strategies while interacting with such dangerous medieval ideas. However, can we draw a new social contract where no major political parties will pay service to such political elements to flourish? Can we expect such moral conduct from our political leaders?

We should not forget, that despite difficult odds, our founding fathers and political thinkers have laboured and suffered in the past to implant seeds of a tolerant society by harnessing a secular vision for our political order.

In particular, South Asian social space have produced thinkers like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Rabindranath Tagore and political leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Suhrawardy, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who have challenged the tide of history to advocate political and social values that are indispensable for crafting a progressive society.

Hence, the incident of Peshawar and the mindless killing of children, who have now joined a long list of innocent people who have grieved and perished under radical religious ideals, should force us to be intolerant and non-accommodative of such entities. The time is ripe for our political elites to rise to the occasion and collectively unite in their hatred for such evil, if any remorse at all is present within their hearts.

In doing so, we must remember that the language of “political compromise,” while being very relevant and fruitful during certain historical junctures, has its own limits and is definitely not applicable in times of grave moral crisis.

To conclude, democratic principles demand that all views must be tolerated. But, does that mean that opinions and prescriptions of forces like the Taliban or any other equally heinous political element should be treated under the same consideration? Certainly not.

Human society has evolved a long way, and some interpretations of our social order are no longer acceptable, no matter how many people endorse them.

Our heart bleeds with the blood of all the children who were mercilessly killed in Pakistan. And it should only solidify our faith in the doctrine that those who have politicised religion to stay popular in public discourse are truly the newer forms of evil who we must collectively fight.

Nonetheless, it is not going to be an easy endeavour, and the fight for a true secular social order demands our complete conviction. So, let us remain focused, and let us, for now, pray for the eternal peace of those children.