Clash of beliefs

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| BJP-LED Hindutva has turned secular India into a state openly pushing a Hindu identity and abusing its Muslim minority.Till recently in most cases of egregious interfaith abuse, Muslim states like Sudan or extremist groups like IS were the aggressors against animist, Christian and Yazidi groups. Unfortunately, as a result, not only they but even all Muslims and 1slam were painted wrongly by Islamophobic brushes as intolerant of people of other faiths.Today, the situation is reversed. Egregious abuse by such Muslims entities has largely died out. South Sudan is free while violence by IS and extremist Pakistani groups has reduced. Now, in almost all recent cases of egregious interfaith abuse, it is Muslims who have been victims of huge abuse at the hands of some people from almost every major belief system: in atheist China, Buddhist Myanmar, Hindu India, Jewish Israel and Christian Central African Republic and earlier Serbia. Yet popular global opinion still views Muslims as mainly aggressors and ignores their new status as arguably the most abused religious group in the world today.But there is also a misplaced sense of victimhood vis-à-vis a global Western conspiracy against their faith among many Muslims. Abuse against Muslims is widespread globally now, but not due to a grand Western conspiracy. It is almost all driven by local politics. Some aggressor states are even anti-West, eg China and Myanmar.Also, the actions of Muslim extremist groups may have fed fury against Muslims in general among other faiths. Obviously, this is just an explanation of and not a justification for the latter`s actions.Also, while egregious abuse has died down, less intense abuse continues in Pakistan and other Muslim states which over the years still adds up to high levels.The ingredients for reignition of egregious interfaith abuse also still exist in many Muslim states: odious ideology; armed groups; vulnerable minorities; and apathetic, weak and even conniving states.Such ingredients are emerging in many nonMuslim states too.While Muslims or their religion can`t be blamed for this, only Muslim extremists captured huge territory. Such groups, despite recent defeats, still exist to some extent in certain Muslim states and retain the ambition and even some power to strike globally. They are also unique in desiring to establish theocratic states and in wrongly presenting their actions against other religions as being required by their faith. Extremists of other faiths are driven largely by a political desire to dominate other religions. Scriptural rhetoric fromthem is rare. While many Muslim extremist groups have regional or even global spans, except some Christian extremist groups, extremist groups in other faiths are nationally confined.Thus, neither Islamophobia nor a sense of victimhood is justified. What is needed instead is a realisation by all about the quick spread of extremism in most faiths which is creating what may be called the `age ofhate`revolving around hatred based on race, faith and ethnic differences. This hatred stems from the hold of extreme conservatism. Its most potent dominance tool in the modern era has been capitalism, which helps capitalists accumulate wealth by exploiting workers in workplaces and consumers in markets. This happens more in neoliberal capitalism than social democratic capitalism which still gives fair returns to workers and consumers.Neoliberal capitalism exploits workers and consumers equally based on social identities. Extreme conservatism supplements the returns from neoliberal capitalism todominant groups via sociopolitical discrimination against weaker minorities, thus reducing their ability to participate equally in markets and workplaces. This happens espe-cially after economic crises reduce returns from capitalism. In response to the decreasing returns, extreme conservatism unleashes more social biases to further entrench the hold of dominant groups over weak groups globally.The spread of extremist groups partially stems from this trend. Some such groups work to extend the hold of powerful groups, eg white and Hindu ones. Others fight the hold of powerful groups via misplaced terrorism, eg Al Qaeda. Some play both roles.So some Pakistani extremists work to extend Muslim hegemony nationally while also being linked to regional and global groups fighting US and Indian hegemony via misguided terrorism. While military action may curb their worst excesses, a rootcause solution for extremism will require defanging the worst excesses of neoliberal capitalism. Until then, interfaith hatred may get fanned further. The writer is a Fellow with UC Berkeley and heads INSPIRING Pakistan, a progressive policy unit.murtazaniaz@yahoo.com Twitter: @Niaz Murtaza2  |