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Bigotry: Fuelling the Fires of Religion Conflict

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Abstract: Religion is a powerful force that molds human life properly. It gives meaning to life and leads people to a modest and disciplined existence. One of the most important aspects of religion is teaching moral and ethical values, which lead to love, forgiveness, and respect for fellow human beings who live around us with different beliefs. However, no religion is superior or inferior to any context to the other. All are equal in their context. But when religion is understood in the orthodox way, when the depth values and moral teachings are misunderstood then their religious beliefs morph into bigotry. Thus, they can become potent catalysts for conflict in society. It also manipulates innocent minds, diverts the thought process on the wrong path, makes people rude and unethical, and creates disharmony among the religions. The paper's title is *Bigotry: Fueling the Fires of Religious Conflict* and it will explicitly narrate how bigotry causes conflict and for people to suffer and how to overcome this mentality to create a peaceful living with other believers in the society.

Keywords: Bigotry, Religion, Conflict, belief, harmony.

Introduction: Literature has been a source of information, deliberation, presentation, reflection, representation, and way of living of human life. It has stood in favor of human beings throughout history by writing of authors in different forms. But the beauty of literature is, that it doesn't cover only literary aspects like; poems, stories, short stories, novellas, novels, novels, articles, journals, periodicals, etc. But literature also talks about sociology, history, language, science, economics, commerce, and so on. Therefore, we see in the literature that writers have come up with many social issues, historical events, scientific methods, financial data, and economic situations in their writings. For example, it can be said that "Lajja (Shame)" by Taslima Nasrin, talks about the social issue of Bangladesh where Hindu families had been persecuted, in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition in India. On the other hand, "A Golden Age" by Tahmima Anam, is a novel that talks about the historical event of Bangladesh, the Liberation War of 1971. The novel specifically deliberates on Rehana Hoque, the main character of the novel, a widow who became entangled in the political turmoil and sacrificed personal demands by the war. Again "Padma Nadir Majhi" (The Boatman of the Padma) by Manik Bandyopadhyay, the novel is about the struggles of fishermen and it is overall about faith, human resilience, and the role of religion in rural life. Even, the novel "Aranyak" (Of the Forest) by Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay narrates about deforestation and the transformation of the land for economic purposes resonates with issues in rural Bangladesh. Likewise, literature covers all the subjects under its banners. As we proceed to discuss "Bigotry: Fueling



the Fire of Religious Violence” from the literature perspective. Surely, it will enhance the total scenario of how people suffer a lot due to the bigotry in society.

Definition: Religion is one of the oldest institutions in the world (Emile, 1912). It is the finest way of living in society. It gives moral and ethical values to live life healthily. It is a system which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Clifford 1973). It is also a way of life, a system of thought and action which provides people with a framework of meaning, direction, and an understanding of the ultimate nature of existence (Ninian, 1989). Religion is the experience of the sacred or the divine, which is expressed through rituals, myths, and symbols, and which is central to the human experience of the world (Mircea, 1957). So, religions are nothing but a way of living and a guideline for profound harmony and peace in the world.

However, the deep meaning of the concept of religion is misunderstood by the people as fanatic or orthodox in their minds. Henceforth, we see in different parts of the world there is violence in the name of religion. There are many reasons behind this cause. But the most fundamental cause of religious violence is “Bigotry”. Bigotry means “Stubborn and complete intolerance of any creed belief, or opinion that differs from one’s own” (OED, 2020). It also refers to an unreasonable attachment to a particular belief, opinion, or ideology, often accompanied by a refusal to accept other views or beliefs. It involves intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination against those who are perceived as different, especially with respect to race, religion, or politics (Merriam-Webster, 1828).

The Psychology and Causes of Bigotry: Bigotry comes from different sources, like ideology, prejudice, ignorance, fear of the unfamiliar, and the demand for a vivid social identity. These predispositions are often activated by religious and cultural dogmas and doctrines by which others' faith is considered inferior, dangerous, and threatening. Bigotry is revealed as a stereotype, dehumanization, and ultimately hatred. These ideas add to polarization all over the world and make collaboration and sympathy across religious lines extremely problematic.

Historical Examples of Bigotry in Religious Violence: In history, from the medieval Crusades (Dan, 2019) to contemporary sectarian violence (Sanjay, 2019), bigotry has played a significant role in religious violence in the world. For example, it can be marked that the Crusades fueled both Christians and Muslims alike which led them to continue wars for centuries. Similarly, the 20th-century violence between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland was prolonged by deeply ingrained bigotry on both sides, each seeing the other as a threat to social and political existence (David, 2000).

The most shocking example of bigotry in religious violence is the Holocaust, where anti-Semitic opinions were used to justify the methodical persecution and extermination of millions of Jews (Laurence, 2017). This massacre emphasized how religious bigotry could be established to justify mass violence, supporting the dangerous need to lecture bigotry at both societal and policy levels.

Influence of Religion on Bigotry: In this contemporary time bigotry lingers to fuel in different forms in different parts of the world. In every religion, there are some fanatics, fundamentalists, reserved personalities, and orthodox people who make some statements or speeches publicly about the other religion which put fuel to the fire to dehumanize other religions or followers of different beliefs. Education is one of the fundamental human rights. Across the world educational institutions are run by the government or by private administrators. It is a natural tendency of people that if an institution is well known, famous, and reputation is good. People



from all walks of life want to admit their sons and daughters to admit their children in that particular institution so that he/she may get a good education and become good human beings. For example, in Bangladesh, St. Joseph Higher Secondary School, Holy Cross College, Notre Dame College, and so on. But at times people from other religions make statements or speeches to fuel the fire to create bigotry to demotivate people of different religions. Sometimes these statements and speeches cause violence, misunderstanding, loss of life, riot, and division among people.

In contemporary times, the world has witnessed and seen the effect of bigotry that fueled the fire of religious violence in Myanmar. The Rohingyas migrated from present-day Bangladesh to Rakhine (then Arakan). They were there as migrant laborers. But the Buddhists always considered them newcomers as outsiders. But after the independence, the Myanmar military enacted a citizenship law denying the Rohingya recognition as an ethnic group, rendering most of them stateless. So slowly the discrimination and violence toward Rohingya started. The violence between Rohingya Muslims and Buddhists started in June 2012. The Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar faced enormous torture, discrimination, humiliation, and dehumanization and even they had to flee from their country to Bangladesh as they found the Buddhist majority people threat in their own country (Ronan, 2021) to save their lives.

On 13 October 2021, at Nanuar Dighir Par, Comilla, Bangladesh there was an incident in the puja mandap during Durga puja Festival. A man called Iqbal Hossain, age 35, placed a copy of the Quran in the puja mandap (India Today, 2021). When this incident broke out in the locality, people attacked the puja mandap, killed three people, many were injured and big damage was found in the locality. Without verifying and investigating the issue, people arrived at rash decisions. The validity of the cause of the incident was not checked and confirmed. This led to unwanted events in life. People not judging what the real incident is. Either Hindu people kept the Quran over there or not. They disrespected or dishonor or not. People were moved by the rumor, influenced by mob psychology, and fueled by bigotry to attack the Hindu people and puja mandap. Even concerning this incident, the violence took place in some parts of the country.

A similar incident happened on Sunday, 25 December 2022, in the Rajshahi Church, a man named Golam Chowdhury, 36 age hailed from Choto Banagram New Colony in Rajshahi City, kept the Quran on the altar of the church secretly wrapped with red cloth. The Church authority informed the police and the person was arrested by the police. The man also claimed himself as Jesus Christ. In the season of Christmas, such kind of incidents is to destroy communal harmony (Daily Observer, 2024). Claiming oneself as Jesus Christ from the other religion is a kind of propaganda to create fight and violence in the community. These acts are very dangerous and harmful to the people.

The aspect of bigotry does not prevail only among or between the religious community. This can exist within the specific religion also. For example, it can be said that among Muslim there are two main sects and they are Shia Muslim and Sunni Muslim. However, apart from these two main sects of groups, there are many other small groups of followers of the Islam religion in the world (Kazi, 1991). But in time there was violence between these or among the groups. Though they were from the same faith, the same beliefs, and the same origin due to bigotorical facts they underwent inner violence and conflict and became two separate groups (Nathan, 2011). Bigotry is a kind of poison in the person or group that emits a kind of negative energy that intoxicates the beauty of life in society.

In the same way, it can be said that bigotry is a kind of burning fire in the ashes that is not seen but alive inside if someone puts his hands or legs on those burns and gives a painful sensation.



There are also many denominations of Christianity, particularly in the Catholic community, where there are many religious groups. The nonsense of bigotry is also there. Consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously groups are indulged in the act of bigotry in times. One of the best examples could be the suppression of the Society of Jesus, known as the Jesuits which was suppressed in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV. The reasons behind suppression were economic factors, political tensions, Enlightenment ideas, and Internal Church Politics (Jeffrey, 2015). This suppression was not done by someone else but by the religious community. But was very badly influenced by the kings of those days namely, Spain, Portugal, and France to be suppressed by the church. Even this is a tendency of the religious groups to feel envy of others when some religious group is doing good in their services or ministries. But the other groups do not put them in their shoes but outcasts make remarks or criticism which leads them to bigotry.

The Influence of the Media on Bigotry: Media has a significant role in perpetuating religious violence across the world and among the religious community. It pours the fuel to spread violence and occurs fight. Even sometimes media silly events or incidents become so luminous that they cause a great mess in society. In this twenty-first century media is an easy excess for everyone. People can browse the net, and upload statements, messages, photos, and videos on different platforms of media like; Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Viber, Imo, Messenger, Twitter, and spontaneously. Immediately that information or news goes viral and people are disturbed. For example, there are some incidents such as; On 1 October 2012, there was a news in The Daily Star which took place on 29 September 2012 in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, a group of mobs attacked the century-old Buddhist, houses, and community. The violence took place from the Facebook post from a fake ID that tagged the Buddhist person. However, the local and social media augmented the false claims without confirming the truth of the post, fueling communal tensions and leading to the demolition of sacred sites and properties.

A report was published in The Daily Star on the Star Online Report on 2 November 2016 that a mob attacked Hindu homes and temples in Nasirnagar, Brahmanbaria, following rumors that a Hindu man had posted blasphemous content on Facebook. Later on, several investigations are made to find out the authenticity or origin of the incident. But no source is found. Afterward, the reporters revealed that it was a fabricated issue to incite communal violence.

There was a report on 21 October 2019 in The Daily Star Newspaper by Star Reporter that a mob made a violent protest for bringing an allegation of a Hindu boy to punish him for a hate conversation from his Facebook account and its messengers. Likewise, there is much fake news, wrong information, and polarized materials generated in the online media sources which create confusion and generate violence, riots, and communal disharmony in the country and the world.

Fighting Bigotry to Avoid Religious Instances: A proverb says, "Where there is a will, there is a way." Therefore, if human beings are determined to do something, they will successfully reach their goal and aims. There is nothing that human beings cannot do. The human beings can do everything possible. Everything is under the control of human beings in the world. Bigotry is nothing but it is just emotions, thought processes, prejudices, orthodox ideas, concepts, ideas, and information. All these come from the mind of human beings only. So, it is manageable or controllable. To control or manage such things human beings have to go through some processes of transformation and that can be only possible by education.

Education dispels the darkness of the mind. It illuminates the hearts and minds of the people from ignorance and inequities. It can transform the whole nation. Napoleon said, "Give me an educated mother, and I will give you an educated nation." Only education can let people know



what is good and wrong. Even Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” One of the best examples of the transformation of bigotry from education is Malama Yousafzai, a Pakistani girl, who was promoting women's education. But the Taliban were against women's education. She was shot by the Taliban and was severely injured. She never gave up. She continued her mission. She used education to challenge their bigoted views (Raphaele, 2017). Her little act has seen the world. This little act of hers pinched not only the hearts of the Taliban of her country but also the many orthodox or prejudiced minds of people across the world to leave their bigotry thoughts.

There was an incident in Rwanda, a country in East Central Africa. In 1994 there was a horrific mass killing incident in the country. Almost this riot occurred for a hundred days from April to July 1994. This incident took place between two ethnic groups. The Hutus ethnic group was the majority targeted the Tutsis ethnic minority group. This genocide caused almost 800,000 to 1 billion people's deaths (Romeo, 2003). Aftermath education played a vital role in the country to make a significant change in the minds of the people. They came under the consideration of reconciliation and reduced the hatred and envy ideology among the younger generation.

Following and living the moral and ethical values of own religion. No religion in the world appreciates or promotes to do harm or humiliate others. All religion teaches us to do good to others, help others, love others, and forgive others. Islam religion mostly talks about peace and harmony. The primary motto of Christianity is love and forgiveness. Likewise, other religion in the world also deals with the same values and ethics.

St. Pope John Paul II exemplifies real moral and ethical values against bigotry. He has shown his example of how a religious leader can go beyond bigotry. On 13 May 1981 St. Pope John Paul II was moving by his automobile car to meet and address people in St. Peter's Square. While he was with the audience, a man called Mehmet Ali Agca, a Turkish gunman and member of the militant group Grey Wolves shot Pope with four shots of which two stuck the Pope. He was dangerously injured. Pope had to undergo an emergency surgery. In 1983, St. Pope John Paul II met Mehmet Ali Agca in prison and forgave him. (Paul, 2020). This gesture of forgiveness and reconciliation exemplified the message of love beyond bigotry. St. Pope John Paul II, new hate brings hate, violence brings violence, killing brings killing, but hate against love brings hope, and violence against dialogue brings peace. Being a religious leader pope made a remarkable gesture in the world to avoid bigotry.

Some well-known politicians around the world are well-known. Bangabandhu Shak Mujabar Rahaman, father of the nation of Bangladesh, is one of them. After the liberation war, he declared general forgiveness for those who opposed the war and supported Pakistan. He did not punish them or take any revenge; instead, he showed moral and ethical principles (Rahaman, 2012).

Nelson Mandela was a widely known personality in the world. He was the president of South Africa. He was put to jail for 27 years. He faced many personal and communal sufferings by the leaders of the particular time. He experienced how he and millions of blacks in South Africa were oppressed brutally. But Nelson Mandela was not moved by vengeance instead he advocated peace and unity with the oppressor with his moral and ethical values of love and forgiveness (Nelson, 1994).

Inter-religious dialogue is one of the means to avoid the bigotry in the society. This inter-religious dialogue creates bondage among the religious communities to spread peace, love, and unity. On the other hand, in times of crisis and challenges other religious communities can



stand beside to prevent the bigotry that is being spread by some people falsely accusing the particular religion. This unity will help to prevent bigotry.

Implementation of government laws is very important to prevent bigotry in the society. Theodor Roosevelt says, "No man is above the law, and no man is below it: nor do we ask any man's permission when we ask him to obey it. Obedience to the law is demanded as a right, not asked for a favor." Cicero also says, "The safety of the people shall be the highest law." So, law implementation is very necessary. If there are straight laws and norms implemented people will be aware of doing wrong or violence to others by spreading bigotry.

Guidelines, rules, and regulations for print and online sources are compulsory to follow to avoid bigotry to fuel religious conflict. Each social media and print media should have the same to prevent such events. Since online media is easy to access nowadays. With a slight touch of smartphones, or computers information, news, videos, and photos are generated very fast for people across the world. But there are several false news, photos, and videos, in the online sources which are not true. It creates confusion and communal disharmony among the people community and turns to violence and riot. But after the incident had happened, people were killed, houses were damaged, and people turned to trauma and lived under insecurity. On 12 May 2022, there was an incident in Sokoto, Nigeria. The name of the boy is Deborah Samuel, Yakubu. He was a student. He was stoned and burned to death after being accused of blasphemy in a social media post. But the incident was false. This false media post accusation mobilized a violent mob. On 21 April 2019, there was a bombing in Sri Lanka during the Easter Sunday Mass in three churches and luxury hotels almost 250 people died and many were injured. After the attack, there was a rumor posted on Facebook that Muslims would do further attacks. This misinformation incited violent mobs to target Muslim businesses and homes, resulting in deaths and widespread destruction (Rohan, 2023). So, if such incidents are posted on the media page, they should be blocked by the authorities themselves to avoid bigotry to fuel violence.

Conclusion: Bigotry has played a powerful force that continues to fuel religious violence, riots, conflict, misrepresenting perceptions, and strengthening troublesome ideologies. Through the critical narration, explanation, and example of historical events and incidents and gathering the information from the contemporary era with methodical case studies, the article has examined the instrument through which bigotry deteriorates religious discord, leading to social destruction and, at times, conflict. Talking bigotry needs a multifaced approach that includes education, dialogue, and policy reform. By cultivating a culture and tradition of mutual respect, love, care, forgiveness, and understanding, communities can work towards reducing the influence of bigotry in religious violence, encouraging peace and unity across diverse faith societies.

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