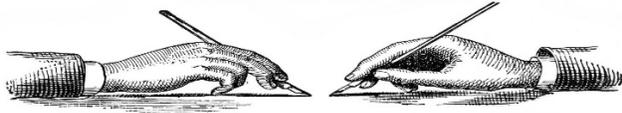


## Editorial



### 'Beware of Groupthink'

By Musafir



While I was growing up in India, Hindu-Muslim riots occurred very frequently. Strangely, we had very close family friends who were Muslims, but they used to become indifferent during the riots. Though they didn't directly participate in violence, they were sympathetic to the Muslim rioters. Similarly, we Hindus didn't express any antipathy towards the Hindu rioters.

Our behavior used to change because of groupthink. Groupthink is a subconscious occurrence in which one starts thinking the way people around them think. This has to do with us maintaining conformity with others in a group. It is always easier to agree with the general majority than disagree, even if it is not the right thing to do. Eventually that behavior becomes a social norm and acceptable. The same happened with Nazi Germany as more

and more civilians either became Nazis or silently supported their power. That groupthink phenomenon got worse as the Holocaust started. It became something that hardly even weighed on their conscious, it seemed so normal to them.

The term groupthink was coined by Irvin Janis, a social psychologist in 1972. He blamed the fiasco at Bay of Pigs to groupthink by John F Kennedy and his advisers. Jani suggested that what had happened in the White House might be similar to what happened among ordinary citizens in the groups he studied for his research. He stated that participant in groupthink often develop a "pattern of concurrence-seeking . . . when a 'we' feeling of solidarity is running high."

It can be said that decision to invade Iraq was a result of groupthink. Groupthink in the Bush administration led the nation into war. Bob Woodward wrote that in moments when the president "had someone from the field there in the chair beside him, he did not press, did not try to open the door himself and ask what the visitor had seen and thought."

Today we see more and more signs of groupthink both in conservative and liberal arenas alike. This can have a very dangerous outcome if we don't realize the peril and change our behavior.

There is a growing trend among neoconservatives to blindly abide and respect authority. There are increasing incidents of belligerence, combative approach among them toward people they find threatening. They seem to support authoritarian

aggression, which is favoring the use of strict, tough, harsh, punitive, coercive social control. Their thinly veiled racism and blunt, bullying language are becoming more and more apparent.

The same is true for ultraliberals. They seem to resort to name calling rather than debate the issues. Ultraliberals attempt to shut down or ban conservative speakers from coming to college campuses. All they need is an authoritarian leader to lead them to bring violence and division in our lives.

We must recognize the symptoms and dangers of groupthink which include the illusion of invulnerability, rationalization of superiority, the tendency to overlook negatives, and the fear of challenging authoritarian decisions. If not checked, it may destroy us in the long run.

*"Cry Havoc! And let slip the dogs of war,  
That this foul deed shall smell above the earth  
With carrion men, groaning for burial."  
(Antony in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar)*

