

# Blood Buddhas: How Indian Heritage Fuels the Terror Machinery

**C**ultural artifacts from across the world are being peddled so bombs can be thrown at us.

How much does a terrorist attack cost? Where does the money come from? How does the money get through to terror groups? How are far-off countries like India an integral part of the terror-funding network?

While Indian journalists like Shekhar Gupta were busy justifying and communalizing the issue, the Antiquities Coalition published some shocking information on terror funding and its linkage to heritage theft. Media's penchant for fake and malleable narratives ensured that this critical topic got no coverage whatsoever.

## **HOW MUCH DOES A TERRORIST ATTACK COST?**

Here is what we know. It is surprisingly cheap to orchestrate a terror attack, one large enough to shake the world. The 2015 attacks in Paris, for example, cost only \$88,160. Interestingly, only \$22,570 was spent in truly criminal activities (making false IDs and acquiring weapons). The rest of it went toward phone bill payments, rentals, travel — the seemingly harmless simple stuff. In other words, the Islamic State (IS) took 130 lives for the price of a mid-range car.

## **WHERE DOES THIS MONEY COME FROM?**

Now, this is where it gets really interesting. Terror-funding sources like oil, money laundering and narcotics have dominated the public perception and media narrative for decades. This image fits in well with a Hollywood-like James Bond villain who funds an evil empire through “traditional” ill-gotten gains.

What doesn't fit into that image, however, is the bad guy selling stolen rag-tag antiquities to fund terror. The United Nations Security Council passed Resolu

2199 saying exactly that. That IS was stealing and smuggling heritage artifacts to fund its terror operations. The United States quickly followed suit passing the Heritage Prevention and Repatriation Act, recognizing “trafficking of cultural property” as a “homeland security” issue — not an art or heritage concern limited to cocktail evenings at museums and high-society dinners.

In short, heritage from across the world is being peddled so bombs can be thrown back at us.

## **HOW DOES INDIA FIT IN?**

Between 2011 and 2016, the declared imports of antiquities into the US grew by almost 50%. That sure is a phenomenal growth rate. More so for a product of a market that is not new or fancy. Of the \$147 million-worth of arts/antiquities imported in 2016, \$79 million came from India. Compare that to Iraq at only \$2.5 million. In short, more than half of America’s arts/antiquities imports had their origins in India.

When you view this in the context of India’s CAG report (the country’s official review and audit agency), commenting on ASI (India’s official agency responsible for preventing heritage-crimes), they chose to not mince words and describe the agency’s efforts as “completely ineffective.”

To add to this, a recent High Court ruling in India had “not come across even a single case, where the persons involved in smuggling the idols out of the country have been independently prosecuted.”

The team at India Pride Project posts regular updates on heritage thefts. Interestingly, most of those thefts are not even officially reported by the local police. No wonder multinational-terror groups chose India for its ripe, repercussion-free pickings.

## **WHY WE ALL ARE WRONG?**

The collective consciousness has gotten two facts drastically wrong. So, let me correct them for you. First, it is actually quite inexpensive to fund a terror attack. Second, it is also very lucrative to trade in stolen heritage.

Once you put these two together, you have a potent, dangerous, flammable mixture ready to explode in your face. As an example, with the gains from selling one Buddha sculpture (stolen from Mathura, India and illicitly sold for \$1 million

terrorists could literally fund a dozen Paris-style attacks. To put that in an extrapolated perspective, that's 1,500 lives that could be lost by smuggling one piece of Indian heritage. Let that sink in for a minute.

So paradoxically, though Lord Buddha spent every waking minute spreading world of peace and coexistence, terrorists today are using his very image to do quite the opposite.

## **THE NATIONAL SECURITY CONUNDRUM**

Heritage destruction has been an integral part of civilizational conquests. Napoleon destroyed Jewish art and we all know what happened with the Bamiyan Buddhas. What is new, though, is where new-age terrorists are taking this deplorable practice.

You and I are regular people. We don't think like IS; we don't get into their headsets and that's exactly what encourages them. National security agencies are still focused on narcotics and counterfeit currency operations, conveniently barking up the wrong tree, just because it fits into a traditional, comfortable construct.

Make no mistake. Just because we have our heads in the sand doesn't mean that terrorists do too. Collective ignorance and government apathy act like a pep rally for them to push the pedal (on heritage crime-funded terror).

Unfortunately, that pedal is in a van that's headed right at us.