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Terrorism in the Present Global Context

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Terrorism is a much discussed issue in the present global context. It is like a nightmare which has deeply disturbed the conscience of mankind. Contrary to the common belief this is a pretty old vintage. We have seen that starting from the ancient era to the modern times, history is full of multidimensional manifestations of terrorism, though it is true that none else than the modern world has been witnessing the gravest exercises of the event, and has been bearing the scars of the terrible attacks on civilization since the late eighteenth century.

The rising rate of terrorist attacks and the growing concern over them are attributable to at least six factors. First, the technology of terrorism has vastly improved in the recent times. Second, the targets of terrorism are much more widespread now than they were ever before. Third, sophisticated means of communication have helped the terrorists in many ways. Fourth, terrorism has become a low-cost and high-premium tool in national as well as international politics. Fifth, causes of terrorism are increasing; and sixth, terrorism has become an industry—giving rise to training camps, consulting firms, research centres, etc. resulting into the turmoil of both national and international systems. The publicity factor also plays an important role. Following the information revolution of the past few decades, terrorist acts win instant and worldwide publicity, thus drawing attention to both the cause and the perpetrators.

However, the constant growth of terrorism can be attributed to the nature of political relationship between individuals and the state. It is a sort of contract to establish a system. So long as the system works according to the contract there is no problem. But as soon as there is a breach of contract, or the system itself is subjected to radical changes without having a legitimate revision of the contract, conflict is inevitable. If these conflicts are not settled amicably well in time, terrorism is necessitated.

A state promotes disharmony and disturbance by permitting centralization of power—political or economic, or both. Concentration of wealth generates unemployment, illiteracy and poverty. Hence, the roots of terrorism and indiscriminate violence, in many cases, lie in misery, frustration, grievance and despair. Apart from these, factors like fundamentalism, deprivation, political frustration, regional disparities, extremism, injustice, discrimination, resentment against the existing order, inequality, etc. also play a major role in causing terrorism. The sufferings are so unbearable that people get prepared to do radical acts even by sacrificing their own lives, in an attempt to effect positive changes. They choose the means of inflicting terror in the public mind to reach their goal. The terrorists desire the people to feel helpless and lose faith in their government's capacity to protect them, leading to undermine the legitimacy of the government itself. Thus, terrorism is fundamentally an attack upon the prevailing legal order.

Terrorism is a policy consisting of three basic elements—(1) the decision to use terror as a systematic weapon; (2) the threats or acts of extra-normal violence themselves; (3) the effects of the violence upon the immediate victims. The acts of terrorism have a different meaning in time of peace and of war. In time of war terrorist acts come within the framework of *jus in bello* and are interpreted as war crimes against humanity. In peacetime, however, its commission invites concern of the humanitarian groups as well as of all involved in the general well-being of this blessed earth. Acts of terrorism, whenever committed, is unlawful and should be condemned in indubitable manner.

Terrorism can simply be stated as an instrument for compelling people, or the government thereof, to submit to the demands of some people (or a group of people) who have declared themselves to be fighting for the preservation of the right to self-determination and the elimination of injustice. Every

kind of social upheaval raises its head when, for a section of people, discrimination, exploitation or tyranny is perpetrated by a state or a government or a community. Such discrimination may be social, political or economic, or may even be religious, all of which we condemn. Condemnation as the protesting voice of the global community is praiseworthy, but only the victim has got to search for redress. It is often the case that the world condemns tyranny, oppression, and exploitation in a feeble ineffective sporadic intellectual manner, while it is left to the victims to seek redress by such means as they consider expedient. Terrorism becomes imminent at this juncture. The victim has no other alternative but to express his disapprobation in an unbridled vengeance.

From this one might identify the following characteristics of the acts of terrorism, which are accepted by the U.S. legislation also:

- (i) They have to be premeditated;
- (ii) They are directed at a wider audience than those affected;
- (iii) They are usually aimed at random targets;
- (iv) They are designed to cause a sense of outrage;
- (v) Their main aim is to influence political behaviour.

It is only natural to recall the incident of September 11 here. The twin towers of WTC were razed to the ground by the terrorists. We are not sure whether the victims of oppression themselves would call their conduct an act of terrorism or not, but they would certainly claim that it was the only way to draw global attention. Terrorism, for them, is a call for justice. From this perspective terrorism seems to have all the virtues of a glorious revolution, but this is a false semblance

Considering the specific nature of terrorism, which distinguishes it sharply from war and rebellion, one may feel inclined to say that the emergence of terrorism is rooted in objective situations of the oppressed masses. Consequently it would be highly improper to interpret terrorism as analogous to crime, though this is the common attitude of the United States. A book released in 1977 from U.S. titled *Disorders and Terrorism* contains the following definition: Political terrorism may be defined as violent, criminal behaviour designed primarily to generate fear in the community, or a substantial segment of it, for political purposes. The U.S. authority tries to influence the common people with the idea that terrorists are not freedom fighters, but criminals. This is how it tries to build up a consensus against the terrorist movements. But thanks to the media that people get a chance to come to know about the other side of the story also, which defeats the U.S. Intention.

Any assessment of terrorism as a method of realizing certain objectives, which are honest and desirable on the face of it without noticing two aspects of terrorism will be unjustified—the motivational aspect and the operational aspect. If we consider the motivational aspect we shall find that terrorism is frequently motivated by the urge for securing and preserving the right to self-determination. The question of the right to self-determination is relevant here because the terrorists are people who have a feeling of deprivation which generates a crisis of identity and frustration, which, in its turn, gives rise to an aggressive tendency. One can probe into the human psychology and find that this feeling of aggression is universally ingrained in it. If aggression, as a reaction to deprivation leading to frustration, is a psychological fact, then there seems to be no point to consider the motivational aspect of terrorism as evil.

Then why do we blacklist terrorism altogether? Is it our reflection of fear of the unknown danger or fear of being insecure by some unknown force? Statistics reveal that the total number of death caused by road accident every year is much higher than the total number of death caused by terrorist attacks throughout the world. But still we are not terrified by the fear of road accidents in the way we are by that of terrorism. The reason lies not in any objective condition, it is rather psychological. Terrorism has been negatively glorified by the media resulting into a mass negative attention globally. If we can shift the focus of our attention to their cause instead of the effects, the problem can presumably be solved, because by performing such acts the terrorists try to draw mass attention to their cause.

But the irony is that the people against whom terrorism is perpetrated are stronger in all respects than the perpetrators, and the result is such that the common peace-loving people are easily duped by the views and opinions of the stronger ones. Consequentially no one is prepared to consider the cause of the oppressed sympathetically. The world media plays a major role here, and as we all know, the media usually speaks for the power—be it political or economical—it is highly improbable that it will justly focus the cause of the powerless oppressed people, which results into such aggressive conducts.

One may of course question the methodology for expressing this psychological phenomenon. That is to say that the employment of terrorism as a method for protecting the right to self-determination may be subject to criticism, but the fact may still remain that the end which people seeks to reach through terrorist practices may still be honest and noble, or simply natural. Strategically the acts of violence are used to weaken the fabric of the society. These acts are intended to subvert and destroy the communication and trust that exist between a people and its government. The end goal is to topple the oppressive government and install one that meets with the ideological approach of the terrorists.

It is time to focus our attention to the kind of means (i.e., actions) taken by a terrorist to reach his goal. Terrorism, as it has been said, amounts to killing or harming human beings and that too indiscriminately. Terrorism produces harmful effects in several ways. The normal life is disrupted as people are hounded by fear and terror. Terrorism breaks down the social, economic, political and legal structures of the affected countries.

Terrorism poses a great threat to human life, human rights, dignity and democratic values due to use of indiscriminate violence. If terrorism is claimed to be a method of protest, then one would definitely compare it with other methods, which may not involve indiscriminate mass killing, and if terrorism as a method can be found to have a more mitigated, sophisticated, and humane alternative, then it would be difficult to disapprove of it. Let us remember that war is not always condemned although it involves quite a lot of violence. Even guerrilla warfare does not always attract condemnation. So the reason why terrorism has been subjected to mass criticism is that, it surely is an avoidable operation. It is avoidable in the sense that alternative courses of action always remain open. People, for example, can't [have] recourse to revolution, or can build up mass opinion against an oppressive government or state. This is what we mean by taking a more sophisticated course of action that does not disrespect humanity.

What we intend to say is that, a course of violent method can be adopted if it is only the last resort. Unfortunately such acts of violence should be restricted to social and political revolution, which refrains from indiscriminate mass killing. So terrorism cannot be recommended as a method of the last resort. As a matter of fact terrorism can be condemned simply because it disrespects humanity through its indulgence in mass killing. In this way terrorism becomes incompatible with the conception of human rights. Thus, regardless of the motivations which the terrorists advance to justify their actions, civilized nations cannot accept or condone the taking of human lives in the name of some political or moral cause. All the people of a nation cannot be held responsible for all the discriminations and oppressions that the terrorists want to counteract. So, if a group of people takes to terrorism and destroys life indiscriminately, it should be considered highly immoral.

Terrorism is of course a shortcut method for the terrorists. Unfortunately, although somewhat like revolution, it brings quite a large number of people under its sweep, there is something wrong in this procedure. In most of the cases a terrorist leader influences common people to commit violence by wrongly brainwashing them with alluring ideas of call for independence—social, political or economic, or for religious freedom, etc., which is nothing short of blackmailing. A few of the oppressed people (who join the terrorist groups under such influence) start believing that the use of indiscriminate violence will lead to their freedom from such oppression, and so it is a struggle for independence

('Jihad' for some), which is necessary for the masses, whatever the consequences may be. Hence, they believe to be doing a heroic deed. Sometimes poor people (who are already victims of oppression) are paid remuneration for joining a terrorist group. So, in that case, they are employed to serve a definite purpose with no ideological concern; they are simply bound to obey their employers. History has been witnessing such cases for long.

A report of March 22 2004, from the *Times* (London) can be referred to here in support of this practice. Iraqi police believes that, 'Terrorists linked with al-Qaida are increasingly recruiting young Iraqis to carry out suicide bombings, brainwashing them with Osama bin Laden's sermons and drugging them before sending them off to wreak mayhem'. The *Times* compares this practice with the medieval cult of the Assassins, who used hashish to conjure up images of paradise in their suicidal attackers, and states that the terrorists lure discontented young men with money and promises of glory for indoctrination. 'It is a long process to brainwash them. They seduce them with money, and then start to use drugs on them until they are half conscious', said Col. Karim Sultan, who is the police chief of Karbala. Unlike the Assassins who used hashish, the terrorists use Artane, an anti-psychotic prescription drug, on the would-be-bombers to give them a sense of invulnerability. Thus it is absolutely true that although terrorism apparently involves people's participation, it is never really spontaneous.

Apart from this peculiar character of a terrorist organization we find that as a method terrorism is not a promising instrument for the people who practise it. Nowhere in the world do we find that terrorism has been successful; e.g., the LTTE movement of Srilanka had to be abandoned due to certain policy decisions taken by the government, the Naxalite movement of Bengal was abolished by the state force, similarly the PLO of Palestine had to withdraw its activities due to Jordonean pressure, and many more. From the practical point of view terrorism is crushed by the state machinery, which means that violence is simply met with violence. Perhaps violence would appear with greater force and strength when the state deploys its machinery to stop terrorism.

It is history that the social revolution that took place in Soviet Russia in the past, the warfare that the world witnessed in Vietnam, and different other forms of terrorism that broke out in the recent and not too recent past were all fights for some absolutely just cause. Unfortunately the motivational aspect of terrorism has never been ideally or ethically matched with a just method for achieving the goal. . . .

This brings us to the question regarding the relation between end and means. What we have said in the above mentioned lines would seem to suggest that the end does not justify the means. This is a question which must be considered very carefully before we can pronounce upon the ethical value of terrorism. There is a prevailing idea that no means is really bad. If the end which it intends to realize is good then the conduct of a Robin Hood, for example, would find easy approval from this point of view. The end for which the man stood was noble by all standards, but the means adopted by him to reach his objective was nothing short of robbery and extortion. But even such means, though otherwise condemnable, gets a semblance of greatness from the nobility of the end. This is an issue on which opinions differ. A Gandhian may contend that the moral value of the end and the means must be viewed separately; i.e., independent of each other. Neither the end justifies the means, nor do the means justify the end. The end is a vision of a future society which must be considered by it. The moral value of the means is simply not relevant for determining the moral value of the end. . . .

There is an opinion that there is no point in assessing the moral value of the means. A means is what it is by virtue of its being an instrument for securing an objective which is usually good or just. That is to say that, a means necessarily has an instrumental value. An instrument is scored by its efficiency to reach the desired objective. Terrorism on this account is either efficient or not to bring about the desired goal. There is meaningfully no question of value or moral merit so far as means is concerned. So the statement that 'means are justified by the end' is simply empty.

This brings us to a debatable situation. Though one can hardly deny that a means is nothing but an instrument, which may fail or be successful in bringing about the desired goal, it is not either illogical or irrelevant to raise question regarding the instrument which one uses to achieve his end. The moral value of a means cannot perhaps be estimated without reference to the objective for which it is used. The very term 'means' indicates its unavoidable relation to an end. So if we want to consider the justifiability of use of indiscriminate violence we have to consider it in the background of its relation to the end to which it is directed, although we have referred to an opinion ascribed to Mahatma Gandhi that the moral quality of the means must be considered independent of its relation to the end. His slogan 'as the means so the end' apparently draws a line between the concept of means and the concept of end. It is very much doubtful if such a separation is really possible, for that would take away much of what is contained in the very concept of means. One can judge the end by itself, but the same approach would destroy the very nature of means as an instrument.

A means is thus related to an end, and we face the question afresh if the end is enough to justify the means. We believe that like the end which we visualize as a prospective social order, we can also visualize what the employment of a means would bring in its trail. One cannot choose to take the wrong path just for the sake of getting his intentions satisfied. For our present purpose let us apprehend that 'wrong path' is the way leading to destruction of humanity. Does any individual or any group of people have the right to bring destruction to the common masses for their own desired aim? The exercise of violence as the inevitable method of terrorizing people is offending humanity at large. Killing of human beings cannot be justified except on ground of self-defence. One is permitted (by the law) to have recourse to killing when abstention from such violence would mean self-destruction. On no other ground can we justify killing of persons who are neither directly nor indirectly responsible for one's oppression. Such acts of cruelty may be effective temporarily, but simply for the sake of its efficacy violence cannot be recommended.

It is easily understandable that in every case where terrorism is resorted to, there are different alternatives instead, which might be employed for reaching the same objective. Instead of indulging in committing indiscriminate violence the terrorists might devote themselves to build up public opinion against the oppressive state, or some kind of revolution may even be generated to reach the same goal. Hence the so-called great and noble goal of the terrorists can never justify the means adopted by them. As we have already said that from the theoretical point of view practice of terrorism would get sympathy of the world population and possibly would get approval also if it would have truly been the last resort. But unfortunately it never has been so, because such a last resort should be preceded by all sorts of alternative civilized attempts to gratify the goal, which is not the case.

This is the point where terrorism becomes condemnable. The perpetrators believe that only use of indiscriminate violence can realize their goal of cleansing the right to all oppression and establishing self-determination. But the right to self-determination does not give freedom to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights or freedom of others. Hence terrorism becomes an 'ism' of cruelty where humanity and civilization is bound to take a backseat. Thus it moves far away from all other violent methods of redressal.

It appears that we are inclined to condemn terrorism from two different perspectives. It is condemnable firstly because it involves indiscriminate killing, which, irrespective of any end whatsoever, cannot be approved. Thus terrorism is disapproved in the first place not as a means, but simply as a conduct of a group of people. In the second place terrorism cannot be approved as a means to an end, because there surely are alternative means, which may be equally effective and less cruel at the same time. Thus terrorism can be supported on no ground whatsoever neither as a conduct considered in itself, nor as an instrument for reaching a certain goal. Though, a terrorist is often worshipped as a hero by the sympathizers of the movement and has been described as a selfless individual who is ready to sacrifice himself for an ideal, he has surely gone astray.

Terrorism takes the shape of mass insurgence when people who mostly remain unaware of the injustice done to them are raised from their complacency. A terrorist then acts as the leader urging people to come out of their passivity and take part in bringing about a positive change in the socio-political system. The deprived people praise him for his efficiency to shake the oppressive government by the means adopted by him, because they are made to believe that such means are absolutely necessary for actualizing the intended change. But in no time the bloodshed terrifies the common peace-loving people who realize that use of the terror method is not truly the last resort, and this is why the moral value of terrorism and the apparent dignity of the terrorist is defeated.

Terrorism, as we know, is always an undue use of force where the immediate target is either innocent people or any of the state machineries, or both. The violence which is committed and the harm induced thereof can never be authorized. The terrorists harm innocent noncombatants in the name of last resort, and due to this reason terrorism never attains the dignity of a Just War. The concept of Just War, if analyzed will show, involves the protection of human rights. But terrorism defies such rights which are provided and even supported by law. The basic right to life, which all human beings must have the opportunity to enjoy, is denied by terrorism. Under no circumstance can anyone steal someone else's right to life, not even in the name of last resort. This last-resort hypothesis may have been a valid and acceptable one if it did not offend some of the basic human rights, e.g., the right to life. So, from a theoretical point of view one may recommend terrorism if it is truly the last resort, but such recommendation is bound to be frustrated as it violates the basic human rights.

What emerges from the analysis of the issue is that the terrorists may be thinking that something must be done in a manner where the wrongdoers will be afraid to do any further wrong, and consequently all ills will be abolished for ever. Are they then trying to punish the machinery of oppression? The government officials, the state machinery of maintaining law and order, the common peace-loving people who do not raise much voice against the oppressive government, and even nations who support or have diplomatic relations with the oppressive state are all parts of that machinery for the terrorists. The terrorist leader behaves like a judge who gives final verdict from his seat of judgment on which the victim's fate is determined. But by doing this the terrorists are harming humanity itself, and civilization is also being threatened.

A hint to the issue of combating terrorism may have some relevance in this context. Many researchers in this field have come up with various ways of which the following are most important—

- i) By changing international law
- ii) By changing government policy
- iii) By improving cooperative mechanisms.
- iv) By strengthening a public diplomacy programme, and
- v) Reprisals by individuals or allied states.

I presume that cultivation of a civilization-friendly normative sense can help to make the global society free from the menace of terrorism. People should be aware of the humanitarian values and feel an urge from within to practise them for the enhancement of good for the global society. If we agree that terrorism is an actio-reactio process, then it can be presumed that a change in the actions can bring change in the reactions too.

* Taken from *Terrorism And Moral Questions* by Dr Sanu Bhattacharya, published by Sarat Book Distributors. Kolkata, 2007, Rs. 250 (PB).