

THE COMING CRISES OF SOCIAL TERRORISM

Terrorism may be motivated by three social factors—structural strain, a process of revitalisation of a particular culture and a perception of relative group or individual deprivation. Thus its causes are both psychological and sociological. Its evolution can be divided into three phases—guerrilla warfare, social terrorism planned and carried out within middle class urban societies and international high-tech terrorism that may gain control of the most advanced weapons of nuclear, chemical and biological warfare to fatally harm millions of people. To combat this evil which may be diagnosed as an illness, a range of sociopolitical and cultural remedies—preventive and curative—must be applied as force and repression alone will not suffice to eradicate terrorism, which rests on an emotional appeal to fanaticism and the wish for revenge.

BHIMASEN HANTAL

The world today is well acquainted with terrorism, its genesis, nature and manifestation, though a full understanding of it is a never-ending debate. Terrorism, like other similar phenomena, may be explained under three broad perspectives—the structural strain, revitalisation and relative deprivation. Under the first approach, terrorism may be viewed as an outgrowth of the feeling of inherent structural strain felt by certain sections of society, precipitated by some immediate cause that results in unleashing revolutionary action through a social movement against the established social order, thereby unbalancing the social structure. This theory belonging to the structural–functionalist school of thought states that over time, such a movement shades its earlier revolutionary ideologies through which it was founded and gradually becomes institutionalised through the process of adaptation, adjustment and concession and moves towards re-establishing social equilibrium. Examples include the Irish Revolutionary Movement and various sectarian movements such as in Chechnya, etc.

Revitalisation explains the process of revolution that emanates from re-energising and re-invigorating a lost or declining culture or tradition with new symbols/mythology or by the revival of old symbols/mythology that are more reactionary in nature. Religious fundamentalism with its fanatical acts of terrorism is one such example. The revitalisation process is often a peaceful cultural or religious revival movement. However, what is dangerous is its extreme and reactionary nature of blaming others as being responsible for its degeneration and of keeping it in its original form through a policy of antagonism and by practicing extreme ideas and values that had earlier become redundant or outdated and been abandoned.

The most important theory that explains terrorism is perhaps the theory of relative deprivation, which incorporates psychological variables such as the subjective perception of the social reality of comparative disadvantages in relation to other groups. To a greater or lesser extent, all individuals/groups are relatively deprived compared to other individuals/groups, taking into account certain psychological or social variables. However, it is the perceived degree of relative deprivation or the perception that others are responsible for such deprivation, which results in revolutionary movements such as terrorism. Many psychological and sociological studies on ethnic violence support the view that prolonged economic or political disparity among social groups, leads to ethnic riots or social violence on even small but burning issues. Group perception of relative deprivation and blaming others as being responsible for it often takes the form of terrorism. All the above theories to some extent help in understanding terrorism but the theory of relative deprivation is more comprehensive as it addresses the roots of genesis more meticulously and systematically than the other approaches.

Terrorism is rooted in the sociocultural fabric of society rather than individual consciousness. The immediate causes and consequences seem to be psychological but are usually sociological. Prolonged social causes such as alienation, deprivation,

Terrorism may be viewed as an outgrowth of the feeling of inherent structural strain felt by certain sections of society, precipitated by some immediate cause that results in unleashing revolutionary action through a social movement against the established social order, thereby unbalancing the social structure.

inequality, poverty, religious degeneration, unemployment, etc, result in terrorism. Similarly, the consequences of terrorist violence create ripples in the social structure and often lead to the formation of social stigma. Particular groups are marked as perpetrators of terrorism because of which the sociopsychological gap between them and other members of society widens. The social distance accumulates with each passing incidence of violence. As a result of the prolonged and widened gap

Revitalisation explains the process of revolution that emanates from re-energising and re-invigorating a lost or declining culture or tradition with new symbols/mythology or by the revival of old symbols/mythology that are more reactionary in nature. Religious fundamentalism with its fanatical acts of terrorism is one such example.

between social groups, all individual members are thought of as being alike. That is, from the acts of individuals of a particular social group, group social stigma is formed and gradually each member of the group is stigmatised, leading to the stereotyping of persons belonging to the group. Through social stigma, a particular social group is considered responsible for terrorism, even though this does not necessarily characterise every member of the group responsible for the acts of terror. By

stereotyping all individuals by virtue of their belonging to a particular stigmatised group, they are considered to possess negative mentalities or psychotic states of mind, even if they do not actively/physically display this through overt actions. In other words, even though an individual may display normal behavioural patterns akin to other members of society and like them blame others as the perpetrators of acts of terrorism, he/she is still considered to have a terrorist mind or ideology by other members of society. This is primarily due to his/her membership of a social group whose members are involved in terrorism. Thus, the social nature of terrorism is manifest psychologically, which is dangerous and difficult to resolve as the virus becomes embedded in the mind.

The evolution of terrorism may be divided into three major phases with regard to approaches and methods. The first was guerrilla terrorism in which jungle or other hidden warfare was directed against the established order. Examples include the Irish model of terrorism, the Naxalite Movement and the activities of the United

Liberation Front of Assam and other similar groups around the world. This approach then led to the perpetration of suicide attacks, which among other methods, uses human bombs. An early such case that shook the world was the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). A woman while garlanding Gandhi exploded a bomb killing both Gandhi and herself. After that, this approach was regularly used by the LTTE until the death of its leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in 2009 and the wiping out of the terrorist outfit by the deterministic and persistent approach of counterattacks used by the Sri Lankan Army. Since the dawn of the new millennium, this approach has also been regularly employed by terrorists in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, West Asia, etc. The 9/11 destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City was another grim example. This incident was followed by a series of terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world. The terror attacks in Mumbai on 26 November 2008 were another example of such attacks.

Relative deprivation incorporates psychological variables such as the subjective perception of the social reality of comparative disadvantages in relation to other groups. The perceived degree of relative deprivation or the perception that others are responsible for such deprivation results in revolutionary movements such as terrorism.

Recently there has been a change in the approach of terrorism. Unlike in the past, highly educated, intelligent and sophisticated people are drawn towards terrorism today and often mastermind cruel acts of terrorism including the use of human bombs. The new youth terrorists often have tertiary degrees, are employed in prestigious organisations as specialists or executives and have wide social networks. They reside in good residential neighbourhoods, work in offices, have good career prospects, a number of close friends both within and outside of work and sometimes have magnetic personalities. They share feelings, jokes, etc with friends and colleagues. They are often married or in relationships. Their behavioural patterns are thus normal. The terrorism perpetrated by such people may be termed as “social terrorism”. These people not only have an excellent social network but their general pattern of behaviour reflects the culture and values of the society they live in. The

second approach (human bombs/suicide attacks) instils danger and fear, as it is difficult to locate perpetrators until the act is done. However, since the acts are usually committed at sensitive areas or installations, certain preventative measures can be taken. After 9/11, it was believed that such incidents would increase in member. However, as a result of high alertness, improved intelligence systems and security setups, the number of such incidents has reduced especially in the United States of America (US). In other parts of the world including India such terrorism has been successfully handled as well, although it is still perpetuated mainly in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria due to the unsettled and volatile nature of their political and security systems.

Social terrorism however, is difficult to diagnose or predict and almost impossible to prevent. Social terrorists are students at educational institutions, young executives at organisations of repute, they intermingle in society, participate in various activities, win the trust of those around them and then on one decisive day, destroy people

Terrorism is rooted in the sociocultural fabric of society rather than individual consciousness. The immediate causes and consequences seem to be psychological but are usually sociological. Prolonged social causes such as alienation, deprivation, inequality, poverty, religious degeneration, unemployment, etc, result in terrorism.

and property. Such individuals may either plant time bombs in areas of weak security setups or sacrifice their lives as human bombs to achieve their goals. Their motives however, are usually uncovered only after the incidents. In an alternate scenario, a terrorist may meet someone at a social occasion, gradually become friends, enter that person's family and social arena and maintain and nurture the relationship over time, until one particular day when the act of terror is carried out. If such a culprit is shrewd

enough, he might even accuse others of that family/community as being responsible for such an act and not only escape conviction himself, but have innocent individuals punished for his crimes thereby creating havoc in the minds of people and society.

The danger of social terrorism is the new social relationship itself due to its non-diagnosable and unpredictable nature. It lays the foundation of a social

relationship in which society sows the seeds of its own destruction. The spread of social terrorism inhibits the potential development of new social relationships and in turn, the development of new kinds of social relationships is threatened by the danger posed by social terrorism. These new social relationships are not spontaneous. Sociologists like Robert Morrison MacIver believe “society is a web of social relationships”, which in turn are the essence of society. However, the rising trend of social terrorism questions the very foundation of society itself. As social animals, it is natural for human beings to not only nurture existing social relationships but also seek out and venture into new ones. Social relationships are also important from a matrimonial point of view.

Another important factor in the growth of social terrorism has been the role of the media. A Hindi movie *Pratiband*, a remake of a South Indian superhit was released in 1990, becoming a blockbuster hit of that year. In the movie, the mafia used a suicide bomb to kill the protagonist—an honest chief minister. Rajiv Gandhi’s death occurred in similar fashion a year later. Thereafter human bombs/suicide attacks became

a regular phenomenon. A few years ago, another Hindi movie called *Fanna* was released, which portrayed social terrorism. The main protagonist (played by the famous actor Amir Khan), was a highly lovable person, who intermingled with college students and even won the heart of a blind girl. He then abandoned her, carried out dangerous acts of terrorism and then vanished from that social scene thereafter. Today, in the real world, sophisticated persons with high levels of professional qualifications and competencies are suspected of being involved in acts of terror. David Coleman Headley for example, established friendships with prominent Mumbai film personalities before his involvement in terrorism became

Unlike in the past, highly educated, intelligent and sophisticated people are drawn towards terrorism today and often mastermind cruel acts of terrorism including the use of human bombs. The terrorism perpetrated by such people may be termed as “social terrorism”. These people not only have an excellent social network but their general pattern of behaviour reflects the culture and values of the society they live in.

known. Other instances of social terrorism have been reflected in several Hindi movies such as *Kurbaan*.

This does not imply that the media boost terrorism but that the creative imagination of films on the social world often has its own social ramifications—at times for good and sometimes for bad. The intelligent and creative terrorists of today's world are more vigilant and keep experimenting with various new methods of terrorism, just like modern scientists. Various possible approaches of terrorism shown in the media attract terrorists and

The danger of social terrorism is the new social relationship itself due to its non-diagnosable and unpredictable nature. It lays the foundation of a social relationship in which society sows the seeds of its own destruction.

they do not hesitate in experimenting. Although social causes are the roots of terrorism, psychological approaches are used to groom cadres of terrorists by methods of brain washing, building in-group solidarity and out-group abhorrence, de-humanisation, emotional arousal of issues, extreme arousal for self-sacrifice,

intimidation, etc. These have all been described in the movie *Kurbaan*. However, media restraint from terroristic depictions, descriptions and narrations will not solve the problem. Apart from books, documentaries and movies there are other potential sources of inspiration and motivation for terrorism, besides the imagination and ideas of terrorist outfits themselves.

As pointed out above, the new social terrorism is difficult, if not impossible, to detect—it is non-diagnostic and unpredictable. Moreover, it attacks the very foundation of social relationships on which society is based. Is there an escape from social terrorism? At the outset, there does not appear to be a solution, as social terrorism is not containable, like the guerrilla or human bomb types of terror. Intelligence and security structures can be put in place to prevent reoccurrences of the latter types of terrorism as evidenced from the US's successful endeavours, but at the cost of creating a high-tech police state. On the other hand, it is worth noting that the recurrence of such types of terrorism in other parts of world has been phenomenal.

Terrorism is a social disease and like many diseases, it could be cured. For instance after its occurrence, damaged buildings and property are repaired and restructured; compensation is given to the next of kin of the deceased and physical and/or psychological intervention is given to the injured. Just as many diseases are preventable so too is terrorism, including social terrorism. Since the root of terrorism is social, social intervention is the best method of resolving crises of terrorism particularly the hidden nature of social terrorism. As outlined above, relative deprivation, revitalisation and structural strain are the prominent factors of terrorism or similar phenomena such as revolutionary movements. Therefore, proper social intervention directed at annihilating these effects would go long way in curbing terrorism.

Social structures based on unequal strata are not in themselves causes, but the prevention of social mobility and the perpetuation of the existing system of hierarchy create an atmosphere of inner contradiction. Thus, the social structure should be restructured to accommodate the aspirations of the discontented members of society through a reformulation of normative

Although social causes are the roots of terrorism, psychological approaches are used to groom cadres of terrorists by methods of brain washing, building in-group solidarity and out-group abhorrence, de-humanisation, emotional arousal of issues, extreme arousal for self-sacrifice, intimidation, etc.

structures and by making the role and status of society more flexible. Culture and religion are vital to any society and are often regarded as *sui generis*. Not only are ideas and values internalised through these institutions but are also expressed as the collective representation of a community by the people adhering to such cultures and religions. Although cultures and religions have social bases, they also have psychological characters, as they possess strong emotional and motivational properties. The changing of social institutions is a natural phenomenon but drastic transformations of long cherished customs and traditions are not easily accepted by any community and often result in cultural shock. As a result, repercussions are often seen in the form of revitalisation. If people believe that drastic changes are due to some visible variables, they try to re-correct through reformation and if they consider them the result of imposition by outsiders, the reactions are magnified. If

they feel that they cannot counter the imposition of so-called cultural imperialism by existing methods of reformation, they often plunge into organised action. Then cultural and religious issues gradually become intertwined with other sociocultural variables such as health problems, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, etc and thereafter battle lines are drawn between “us” and “them” —the alleged perpetrators of the cultural shock. As they are unlikely to succeed through the medium of discussion, persuasion or even conventional war, they plunge into terrorism.

Thus, in place of cultural imperialism/universalism, cultural relativism must be applied to resolve crises by which all cultures are evaluated by their own contexts rather than through ethnocentric attitudes or universal standards of cultural

The changing of social institutions is a natural phenomenon but drastic transformations of long cherished customs and traditions are not easily accepted by any community and often result in cultural shock. If people believe that they cannot counter the imposition of so-called cultural imperialism by existing methods of reformation, they often plunge into organised action.

imperialism. This does not mean that all elements of particular cultures such as human sacrifice for instance should be furthered. Rather these should be prevented not by cultural imposition but by education and economic development, which increase standards of living, promote scientific temper and universal standards and take care of the process of acculturation of modern, scientific and universal values considered appropriate by most members of global society. Normally people themselves come forward with the sort of

reformation needed like the *Brahmo Samaj* of Ram Mohan Roy on *sati* during British rule in India, Syed Ahmed Khan’s Aligarh Movement or Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar’s movement on social equality and so on.

Furthermore, when prolonged relative deprivation and objective identification through subjective perception are perpetuated and the deprived people realise that existing methods are not conducive to resolving their problems, they often resort to extra-constitutional methods, as witnessed during India’s freedom struggle.

Naxalism is another type of expression of relative deprivation, while an extreme type of such a method is terrorism. The basic difference between Naxalism and

terrorism is that the former aims at internal reform through revolutionary actions and violence supported by utopians ideologies. The latter on the other hand, is directed towards spreading chaos among the people and government in order to overthrow the existing establishment and replace it with a new social structure and system of government most often with the support of some alien power and often with the likely tendency of sectarianism. Naxalites do not usually attack citizens especially the poor, rather their violence is aimed at the existing establishment and its law and order apparatus. They try to win the trust of the common people and bring them into their fold especially the poor and disadvantaged sections whereas terrorism is directed against not only the existing establishment and system of government but also the common people. It spreads panic among the people through terror and terrorists try to capture the attention of the international community through their actions. In India, Naxalism is restricted to the national boundary while terrorism is not. Over time however, the two appear to have overlapped.

Without social interventions such as applying cultural relativism, bridging the inequality gap, capacity building, development programmes, increasing standards of living, infrastructural development and the removal of ignorance, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, etc, psychological interventions will not achieve their desired results.

As most causes of terrorism are sociological, both psychological as well social interventions are required, especially as over time social factors become rooted in the human psyche. However, without social interventions such as applying cultural relativism, bridging the inequality gap, capacity building, development programmes, increasing standards of living, infrastructural development and the removal of ignorance, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, etc, psychological interventions will not achieve their desired results. Similarly only sociological interventions will not be sufficient, though they are essential. This is because over time psychological methods of grooming terrorists—social estrangement and propaganda orchestrated to rationalise terrorism, de-humanisation, etc—become part of the psyche of terrorists. They reside in their minds and the well-off sections of terrorists (social terrorists) are prime examples. Although individually they might not have a sense

of alienation or deprivation, group solidarity and psychological methods of brainwashing condition them to indulge in inhuman acts. Therefore, social intervention alone though essential, will not wipe out terrorism, especially social terrorism, unless proper psychological interventions are undertaken as well. The media could play an important role in psychological communication provided the social evils responsible for the development of terrorism are properly addressed.

Thus although there are diverse ways for resolving crises of social terrorism, only modernising intelligence and security systems while overlooking basic reasons of terrorism will not achieve the desired and sustained results of peace. Some sacrifices will be essential for sustainable development by curbing greediness and influence.

If systems of inequality, poverty, unemployment and familial and social prejudices of influence persist, then today's influential, rich or corrupt might languish in poverty in generations to come. Moreover, primordial affiliations are not everlasting as they are man's handiwork, which over time undergoes changes.

It must be borne in mind that nothing is permanent and all things shall pass away. If systems of inequality, poverty, unemployment and familial and social prejudices of influence persist, then today's influential, rich or corrupt might languish in poverty in generations to come. Moreover, primordial affiliations are not everlasting as they are man's handiwork, which over time undergoes changes. For instance, members of the backward and business communities,

Brahmins, etc became kings in ancient/medieval times, overtaking the earlier sacred rulers, the *Kshatriyas*. Today there is political upheaval among communities throughout the world—traditionally oppressed communities have become rulers in some Indian states, while Palestine once considered a region of the Islamic world is now in part a sovereign Jewish state. Most hurdles to social development are caused by bureaucrats, businessmen, politicians and vested interests with primordial ties. If these people want a world of peace for themselves and future generations, they must become sensitive to humanism in the current generation in which they live. For example, in the case of climate change there is now a conscious effort for personal development by the world community. The latter however, should also be sensitive to the sustainable development of people as the social environment is

an important component of the ecological system. Professed moral values must be put into practice. Unless we bring back peace in the world, our own future generations if not ourselves, will be in danger of succumbing to the stress of physical, psychological and social disorders.

Apart from social interventions, which require administrative sensitivity and strong political will, some well-crafted messages must be transmitted through modern technology to the concerned people in a transparent manner—like the fact that the concerns of minorities and relative deprivation are being addressed. Every locality or region has some sort of minority, whether based on caste, class, religion, sex or tribe. This is true of both

developed and developing nations. For instance, in affluent Western societies there are Calvinists, Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans not to mention Muslim etc, as well as various classes based on economic, educational and other sociopolitical variables and gender stratifications. Primordial societies also have sociocultural differences, whether they are pluralistic/secularist countries like India or Islamic states. In the latter there are diverse social groups based not only on economic, educational and

Primordial societies also have sociocultural differences, whether they are pluralistic/secularist countries like India or Islamic states. In the latter there are diverse social groups based not only on economic, educational and political variables but also on beliefs, morality and values. There are differences among and between Shias, Sunnis and several other denominations.

political variables but also on beliefs, morality and values. There are differences among and between Shias, Sunnis and several other denominations and their ethnic conflicts are often reported from various parts of the world. Individual and social differences are thus quite natural. Heinous acts to achieve certain goals like absolute homogeneity based on sectarian interests will not resolve the inherent crises as was shown from the experience of Nazism. The positive attempts of cultural relativism, sustainable socioeconomic development and the spread of universal values such as globalism, humanism, morality, patriotism, tolerance, etc are the need of hour—for the people of today as well as for generations to come. Social reconstruction for pluralism and not for sectarianism is the answer. Moderates in groups involved in

terrorism could be used as ambassadors or models of peace through the effective utilisation of the mass media for de-conditioning brainwashed people. However, as stated above these will be successful only when core sociocultural issues are addressed and that too in the right spirit.

Thus, broad equality among various social groups must be envisaged. There should be no manifest or latent attempt at alienation or separation due to sociocultural variables, but on the other hand, not all should be forced to be alike as well. Based on variables, there should also be no discrimination, except when such a policy is for bringing the least advantaged sections into the mainstream through conscious and deliberate policies for socioeconomic development. While doing so the cultural and religious values of such groups must also be respected. Social development and transformation within the framework of cultural relativism is the most important instrument of humanism and for this reason, it is antithetic to terrorism. Pure equality may just be a humanitarian dream—however humans do possess the capacity to change their environments through development and transformation. People at the helm of affairs must strive in a transparent manner towards humanism through the multipronged approach of social and psychological development and transformation. Psychological methods will succeed only when sociological techniques are successful.

It should be borne in mind that for every positive outcome, there has been a series of sacrifices. For achieving freedom, the nationalists sacrificed selflessly and some even laid down their lives. Towards the abolition of apartheid in South Africa, people like Nelson Mandela spent a large part of their lives in jail. To protect citizens, armed forces personnel lead strenuous lives of hardship in hazardous climates on borders. For feeding nations, poor peasants work day and night under the vagaries of climate conditions, although many live in want and ignorance themselves.

The immense sacrifices of our forefathers have been the reason for the survival of the human race. However, given the present conditions of the social world, how long will our world survive? Terrorism has evolved from being local to national and international in nature and if proper measures are not taken it will soon become global, mainly due to modern communication technologies. Terrorists so far have been more successful in employing psychological techniques for spreading and increasing terrorism than governments and the international community have been

in curbing it. This is because the social factors of alienation, cultural imperialism, deprivation, hunger, inequality, poverty, suppression, *et al* support terrorists' attempts at rationalising their actions and indoctrinating others to follow them, rather than the international community's attempts at removing inherent social problems. Thus, social problems are capitalised by terrorists for arousing emotions, building cadres and spreading networks while governments are often unable to check their growth despite vast resources at their disposal, as their energies are not directed at removing the causes of social evils.

Social terrorism is international in nature and could become global, posing more severe challenges and crises for mankind than ever before. Innocent people may have to bear the brunt of incalculable damage to life and property. The worst scenario would be if a nuclear bomb or an advanced lethal biological agent developed for germ or genetic warfare by some government were to fall into the hands of terrorists. Social development and transformation would be of no use if the intended beneficiaries live in a state of crises and danger. Therefore, basic socioeconomic problems must be addressed on a war footing. Not just terrorists but all the people responsible for the backwardness of nations, the degeneration of society, the exploitation and suppression of people, the spreading of hunger and deprivation, the widening of inequality, for their own vested interests must be severely dealt with. Anything garnered out of corrupt methods will eventually lead to bigger problems for people and society and we ourselves or our descendents will have to pay the price for such *mala fide* and corrupt actions. Every action has its equal and opposite reaction but in this context the reaction could be far greater and possibly unbearable. ❧

Terrorism has evolved from being local to national and international in nature and if proper measures are not taken it will soon become global, mainly due to modern communication technologies. Terrorists so far have been more successful in employing psychological techniques for spreading and increasing terrorism than governments and the international community in curbing it.