

A Vedic Solution to Terrorism

by Satyanarayana Dasa

Terrorism is the systematic use of terror, especially, as a means of coercion. It has always existed in society.

From the ancient scriptures of India, we know how evil forces such as Raakshasas (demoniac kings) frightened the devotees of Lord Vishnu (the second in the Hindu Trinity). In the epic Ramyana, demon king Ravana wanted to get even with Lord Rama, so he kidnapped Rama's wife Sita and tormented her. Similarly, according to *Shrimad Bhagavata Purana*, Kamsa wanted to kill Lord Krishna. He, therefore, terrorised the peace-loving residents of Vrindavana, who were Krishna's followers.

In the recent times there have been rulers like Adolf Hitler, Idi Amin and Pol Pot who engaged in pogroms and mass massacre in the name of religion.

Terror with the Help of Technology

In the past, terrorism was mainly propagated by rulers. They attacked the kingdoms of their enemies and plundered the citizens or they discriminated against a section of people in their own kingdom because citizens would not dare to go against the ruler.

At present the scenario is different. Even those who are not in power can create terror with the help of technology. Technology has made mass massacre easy. 9/11, the blasts in London, Bali or Karachi are vivid examples of misuse of technology.

As the global terror is increasing, tougher safety measures are being enforced and it is paradoxical that security measures themselves are becoming a menace to common citizens. There are tougher security checks everywhere,, at the airports, a mall or while buying a mobile phone connection. We are becoming as afraid of the anti-terror personnel as of the terrorists! There is a sense of alarm all around. Life has become very uncertain and fearful. People do not feel free as before. The atmosphere is more like what we used to hear or read about the communist Russia. Ultimately, the situation seems to be offering a real pathway to the goal of terrorism—to terrify innocent people.

An Insight into the Face of Terror

What is the real reason behind terrorism? Mainly, it is lack of proper education and a very strong, misplaced conviction in some religion or ideology. A person's action is based on his or her knowledge and convictions. Let us examine the mind of a terrorist. We will be astounded at the sheer amount of 'dedication' these individuals display.

Before an individual takes some drastic action such as to engage in terrorism, he makes a conscious decision to frighten people and then meticulously plans to execute it. He gathers the

means to execute his plan, which include the necessary financial resources and suitable manpower, weapons, etc. He also undergoes a rigorous training session himself before getting his partners or assistants do the same. All this is very time consuming. And all along, he remains fixed in his goal of terrorism. This needs constant reminder of the goal.

Nobody will deny the fact that one's own life is the most precious thing. One can give up anything to protect one's life. There is a deep attachment to one's physical body. The only exception is when one identifies with another person or object — relatives, nation or religion—and can sacrifice one's life for the sake of that object. To sacrifice one's life for a cause other than one's self, however, needs very deep faith and motivation. Nobody is born with such a mindset.

Egotism in the Guise of Love

There are other exceptions in which one can sacrifice one's life: for the sake of love or out of egoism. Terrorists are certainly not people with loving hearts—perhaps because hatred cannot be a basis for love. Even if they are, it can be argued that they sacrifice their life for the love of their religion. But such a love is nothing but egotism with a veneer of love.

In every human being, in varying degrees, lies a powerful beast just under the skin. At the slightest prodding of the ego the beast can be instigated to growl and roar. This beastly nature is more prominent in some than others; also, it is more prominent in youth than in the old. The perpetrators of terrorism know this fact well and make use of it to the full. It has been observed that the executors of terrorism are mostly youth and religious bigots. They consider themselves the saviours of their faith and it is upon themselves to act on behalf of the congregation. They are made to feel that their egos have been bruised by another religion or community; their religion or faith is in danger from the opponents; the only solution is to take revenge. There may be a few other reasons also behind terrorist acts such as oppression of a minority or a political motive.

Power versus Education

Killing extremist-minded people will not eradicate the problem. The real problem lies within the mind, which manifests outside. If we kill or prosecute terrorists, they will be replaced by another set of such people. The process will continue. It has continued for ages. Terrorism cannot be quelled by the use of power alone. No doubt power has its use. Those who are hell bent upon terrorism and who are beyond the point of transformation should be dealt with by power.

But there are many who, if given a proper chance, will change. It seems easier to exercise power than to educate. But the results of both the approaches are different. Lord Krishna used both judiciously. He exterminated the wrong-doing rabble and, at the same time, spoke *Bhagvad Gita* to teach peace, harmony and love. He carried the *Chakra* to deal with hardcore terrorists, and things like lotus, conch and flute signifying peace, knowledge and love for the rest.

Therefore, along with the discriminative use of power, the permanent solution to extremism lies in a proper, value-based, complete education. A human being without proper education, as per ancient Indian tradition, is a beast—*jnanenah hina pashubhib samana*. The Vedic education system prescribed two types of *vidya* (knowledge)—*para-vidya* or higher education and *apara-vidya* or lower education. *Para-vidya* is related to life, spirituality and the creator.

Apara-vidya is related to profession. At present the *Para-vidya* is missing from our education system. The modern education teaches mostly *Apara-vidya*. In the Vedic education system, *para-vidya* was compulsory, *apara-vidya* was optional! In the current context, we can say that every student should be given basic knowledge about the major religions of the world, stressing their positive aspects and dispelling the doubts about the negative aspects. Students should also be taught the principles of love and co-operation.

Awareness of Terrorist Actions

Although we are all individual beings, we are part of the same universe (*uni-one, verse-centered*). We primordially belong to one unit and if we harm one part we are harming the whole unit to which we also belong. As a result, we harm ourselves. Hurting others is tantamount to hurting ourselves. This must be inculcated on the minds of young students.

There should be stories, skits and plays incorporated in the syllabus to teach the principles of love, peace and harmony, and to depict the horrible outcomes of violence on innocent beings. It is worthwhile to invest in such an education, given the fact that so much money is being spent on newer and tougher security measures with little or no effect on terrorism.

It is also important that the people belonging to the faiths or ideologies that nurture terrorists, show their strong disapproval towards terrorism as a way of solving disputes. Terrorists should be made aware that their actions can result in a backlash from their own people. They should not be honoured or depicted as heroes or martyrs. They are demons and should be known so.