

“Would terrorism become a thing of the past :

When and How?”

by

Balmiki Prasad Singh*

We are living in difficult times. The spectre of terrorism has acquired alarming propositions. The story of terrorism from 9/11 of New York to 26/11 of Mumbai to 3/3 of Lahore is not a closed chapter. New areas are coming in its fold with bearing on our lives and democratic governance.

Setting and Argument

The story of terrorism is not new. In contemporary history New York became a major victim of terrorism on one September morning in 1920. A car bomb loaded with 100 pounds of dynamite and 500 pounds of cast-iron slugs was driven by an Italian anarchist and it exploded in front of J.P.Morgan building killing 39 persons. The driving force behind this terrorist attack was that the anarchists were horrified by the brutality of industrial capitalism and outraged at the U.S. support.

Anarchists are now a thing of the past. Would *Jihadi* terrorists of 9/11 who attacked the World Trade Centre in New York, 81 Septembers later become a thing of the past? The short answer to this question is that this will not happen automatically. Unlike the anarchists of the last century, the terrorists of today are driven by religious faith and a strong sense of economic deprivation and cultural alienation. To overcome the current day terrorist challenge requires a commonality of undertaking and a combined approach that has a mix of military, dialogic and diplomatic efforts.

Recent origins of Terrorism

The seeds of modern day terrorism were sown during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the response of western powers thereto.

With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 commenced a fresh ‘*great game*’ between the two super-powers i.e the United States of America and the Soviet

Union. The CIA seeking counter measures recognized that use of religion could be a potent force against communism. In this game of using religion to challenge communism, France, Greece and Italy gave massive financial aid to Rightist Christian Organizations to enable them to defeat the communists. Britain fully supported this move.

Islam too came handy. The idea of *Jihad* or 'holy war' against the Russian invaders of 1979 was carefully planned by the CIA with support from Afghanistan, military intelligence services of Zia-ul-Haq and financial support from Saudi Arabia. In 1989, the Soviet invaders of Afghanistan were defeated and sent home.

The CIA celebrated the victory of its policy in Afghanistan in 1989 with champagne mentions John K. Cooley in introduction to the third edition of his book '*Unholy Wars*'.

The alliance among the Americans and the Islamists forces against the Russians in Afghanistan led to tribal conflicts within Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan were ravaged by drugs, poverty, and horrific war injuries from fighting and landmines. This led to the rise of 'holy wars' against the western powers. A new programme of training of militants started not only in Afghanistan but also in Algeria, Egypt and other Arab states. This was financed by private fortunes of men like Osama bin Laden, Islamic Banks and charities, and the huge proceeds of the drug trade which flourished during and after the war. All these culminated in 9/11.

After 9/11, the immediate goal of the US was to dismantle Al-Qaeda's widespread and well-entrenched network (in Afghanistan and its neighbourhood) built by Osama bin Laden and his son-in-law Muhammad Omar, head of the Taliban. The US armed forces, together with the armies of its allies, acting on the mandate of the UN Security Council, succeeded in dismantling the Taliban regime within a short period (October-November 2001). They installed a civilian administration led by Hamid Karzai in December 2001 at Kabul. The focus then shifted to what President Bush declared as the 'axis of evil', comprising of Iraq, North Korea, and Iran.

Iraq was singled out for military intervention. The US and the UK attacked Iraq in March 2003, after a war sanctioning resolution failed to gain support in the UN Security Council. The US and the UK, with military ground forces of about

300,000 and ably supported by its air power, silenced the comparatively insignificant Iraqi resistance, and installed Ghazi Mashal Ajil al-Yawer as President of Iraq in May 2004. Saddam Hussein, the then President of Iraq, was subsequently captured by the US military on 13 December 2003. The war has, however, created a deep humanitarian crisis in Iraq and a deep political crisis in the international system.

The use of military since 9/11 has made it evidently clear that while military intervention is essential but it alone cannot bring lasting peace.

The use of religion in statecraft has also shown how dangerous it is. As a global society we have failed to envisage long-term bad effects of using religious fundamentalism as an instrument of statecraft. There is a need for a new approach. How to effect change?

It was during my tenure as Executive Director of the World Bank in Washington DC, that the catastrophe of 9/11 took place. In the wake of the tragedy, it became fashionable for every thinktank to discuss two questions : ‘*What went wrong?*’ and ‘*Why people hate us [Americans]*’? I attended one such meeting. The guest speaker concluded on the sombre note of the need for building a coalition of nations against terrorism. The presentation over, the Chairperson said that India may have the answer because of its heritage of pluralism and its originality of mind, and gave me the floor. I was not prepared. I recall saying then that ‘*while India may have the answer, I do not*’ and I went on to narrate my experiences in handling terrorism in India. This was one of my responsibilities when I was Home Secretary in the Government.

I have been reflecting on this theme since then trying to construct a framework for a global public policy- a policy for harmony among different people and societies in the post 9/11 world as seen through the lens of the Indian experience.

Origins and Relevance of Bahudha approach

It is said that when the student is ready the teacher will appear. I was drawn to an approach that has greatly contributed to the enrichment of Indian life: ‘*respect for another person’s view of truth with hope and belief that he or she may be right*’. This is best expressed in the ancient Rigvedic hymn that *enjoins Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*. The Real is one, the learned speak of it variously.

My title for this book is *Bahudha*. This is derived from the word *bahu*, and *dha* is suffixed to it to make it an adverb. ‘*Bahu*’ denotes many ways or parts or forms or directions. It is used to express a sense of manifoldness, to express frequency, as in ‘time and again’. *Bahudha* is also used as an expression of intermittent continuity in various time frames. In the present work, I have used the term *Bahudha* to suggest an eternal reality or continuum, a dialogue of harmony, and peaceful living in society.

The *Bahudha* approach recognizes that there is a distinction between pluralism and plural societies. Pluralism is an inevitable ingredient of democratic societies. In such societies, there are various boundaries : racial, linguistic, religious, and at times even ideological. The *Bahudha* approach does not believe in annexation of boundaries or assimilation of identities and propagation of a single simplistic world view. It merely facilitates dialogue and thereby promotes understanding of the collective good. The realization of one’s own identity may sustain boundaries and yet, at the same time, the understanding of other identities may help formulate a public policy of harmony. The *Bahudha* approach is conscious of the fact that societies without boundaries are not possible but also recognizes that there are common threats that transcend boundaries.

Pluralism would be the closest equivalent to *Bahudha* in the English language. In my world view, *bahudha* is more than pluralism- of course, it denotes many diversities but it is also an attitude of mind. The moot question is how this *Bahudha* approach relevant in today’s terrorism afflicted world?

In today’s world, the power of the militarily weak to create unrest and destruction has emerged as a global phenomenon. Economic power and the use of military force have proved inadequate agents for the preservation of peace. The dilemma is : How to cope with an enemy that is physically weak, but endowed with a ‘do or die’ mentality?

Terrorism is now truly a global phenomenon. It is lethal and cheap. Terrorist attacks could invariably come by stealth, masterminded by some computer whizz-kid along with some science or technology major. There are many players in the field : fanatics, criminals, drug-traffickers, mafia and warlords. It is a highly unconventional war that cannot be successfully fought with only conventional weapons or tactics. The state must learn to be flexible and agile. It calls for and has full scope of cooperation at the global level.

The danger of ineffective handling of terrorism also comes from 'failed' states. The world is threatened less by strong nation-states than by tottering and failing ones. The danger lies in the fact that these 'failing' or 'failed states' have a tendency to establish a nexus with criminals, drug mafia, and fundamentalist.

To overcome terrorism we need to closely look at four field of state and society and integration among their approaches. These are (i) military intervention; (ii) religious harmony; (iii) education programming; and (iv) strengthening of international political architecture : United Nations.

Role of Military

In our fight against terrorism the military has a significant role to play.

A question is often posed about the role and relevance of the military in the construction of an environment for creative dialogue among civilizations. In the post 9/11 world, it is quite obvious that the ugly face of terrorism has given full justification for a strong military posture. In fact, the rise of terrorist activities in different parts of the world demands it. It, however, does not mean that military intervention can be taken in an arbitrary fashion either within the country or among nation-states.

In the aftermath of 26/11 Mumbai tragedy we have rightly reacted with restraint. We have appropriately moved towards strengthening of our legal framework, our security infrastructure, and our criminal justice system. However, we need to remain vigilant about Hindu-Muslim unity and accord the Muslims greater opportunities in education and economic welfare programmes. India has both the ability and a rich tradition to pursue this goal. At the same time we should resist

any attempt to arouse religious fundamentalism as this will not counter terrorism but it will only lead to further weakening of our society and the nation-state.

People are running out of ideas on how to deal with terrorism. Recently, the United Kingdom has decided to spend 4,00,00 at an advertisement campaign in Pakistan radio and televisions in which well-known established Muslims will tell Pakistanis that they are happy and successful in the UK and therefore, they should not be subjected to terrorism. This is policy of appeasement and at best a soft approach.

Position of Religion

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the famous German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) made an astounding statement declaring the 'death of God'. Advances in science and technology gave human beings new powers of control over the forces of nature and that, in turn, let several writers and thinkers to declare their independence from God. The Age of Reason had dawned and started asserting itself.

But by the end of the twentieth century, however, religion began to re-assert itself and began to influence world events. Politicians, journalists, and scholars started realizing the extremely powerful value of the religious motives of citizens and the need to use their beliefs in the promotion of development, peace and happiness in society.

Simultaneously, religions also witnessed the rise of fundamentalist groups in their midst. Jewish fundamentalists, Hindu radicals, angry Buddhist monks, Christian rightists, and Muslim fundamentalists started catching news headlines. The rise of Islamist elements among believers of Islam, in particular, received extraordinary notice in the West and people began expressing their world view in terms of a clash between Islam and Christianity.

The re-assertion of religion in public affairs also came to mean a revival of the traditional belief that 'my religion is the best'. The fact that identifying religion with dogmas and beliefs had led to several wars in the past and inflicted sufferings on fellow citizens began receding inhuman consciousness. Several questions are

being asked: what is the political role of religion? How does it affect state policy? What is our religious experience?

In the enunciation of the Islamic faith, the well-known Sufi poet Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi puts it beautifully when he writes, "*The lamps are different but the light is the same : it comes from beyond*". There are similar expressions in other religions as well. All these strengthen the logic that there can be salvation outside the church or the synagogue, outside the temple or the sangh, and outside the mosque or the gurudwara. Even under the guidance of the same scripture, different communities have developed different ways of worship and communion with the creator. This, in turn, has created manifold forms of religious dialogues and forms of worship.

The re-emergence of religion as a vital force in the twenty-first century, both at the individual and community levels, needs to be taken into account in the formulation of a public policy of harmony. The different religions should be regarded as comrades in a joint enterprise in facing the common problems of the peaceful coexistence of the peoples, international welfare and justice, racial equality and political independence of all peoples.

Religion is a potent force. As an agent for the generation of peace and happiness, it generates goodwill among people, and helps them to lead a life of spirituality and fulfillment. In recent years, we have seen how people like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King have used it for achieving justice and freedom. Swami Vivekananda and Mother Teresa have been inspired by their religious faiths to serve the poor, the derelict, and the discarded. It is religious faith which has driven the Dalai Lama to propagate the message of love and peace not only among his Tibetan people(including those living in exile in India) but also in distant lands.

Education for A Better Citizen

The task of utilizing education as an instrument of harmony is not an easy affair. The educational curriculum, in particular, has become in several countries an ideological battleground. The interpretation of historical events often excites religious and ethnic groups who start taking positions that are not always rational. Yet, education is the most dependable resource for preparing the youth for initiating dialogue.

It is true that in societies marked by a continuing intolerant ethos, in which religious or ethnic groups blindly espouse their narrowest possible perceptions, education can only play a limited role. Patience and time are needed for education to play its expected meaningful role in bringing peace and harmony in the world. The biggest positive factor is that despite all odds youth all over the world are full of hope.

We have to look beyond the events that have characterized the global scene since 9/11. Two aspects of education would, however, remain paramount. First, education must strive to create in young minds a willingness to tolerate differences of opinion the desire to understand different points of view. Second, the massive progress in science and technology has tended to stress the intellectual rather than moral and spiritual values.

What we need is a synthesis of these value-spiritual and moral as well as intellectual-with the aim of producing a fully integrated human being. Such a person would be both inward looking as well as outward looking, who searches his own mind in order that his nobler self may prevail at all times, and at the same time recognize his obligations to his fellow men and the world around him.

International Political Architecture : The United Nations

The role of law within a nation-state as well as in the wider world is an essential pre-requisite to peace and happiness. Towards this, there is need to strengthen our international political institution : the United Nations.

The theory of preventive war enunciated by the United States in its National Security Document of September 2002 making *inter alia* its unilateralist approach in tackling terrorism explicit needs to be reviewed. The UN Charter calls upon member states to attempt to settle disputes peacefully and failing that, to make a reference to the Security Council for appropriate action including use of military force in terms of Article 51. The categorical position emerging out of Article 51 is that states refrain from the use of its military till an armed attack takes place. This has been repeatedly violated but it needs to be respected for building a harmonious world.

The UN needs to be re-organized in several ways : by expanding the Security Council to reflect present day political and economic realities; by funding a permanent peacekeeping force. An empowered Economic and Social Security Council would also enable the UN to play a more effective role in reforming the global economic and financial system, represented by the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, to give all nations including the advanced industrial countries a role in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Outlook

Transnational terrorist networks are now using religion and items of economic wealth, like illegal trade in drugs, in pursuit of their objectives. The increasing relevance of warlords in polity management, the growing number of insurgent outfits, and new mercenary agencies have emboldened terrorist networks and added a new feature to warfare. The new terrorism has prospered particularly in those countries where law and order has broken down to a considerable extent, for example, in Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, and Pakistan and where religious fundamentalists have an impact on the education system and considerable say in the state policy formulation mechanism.

The alienation of Muslims living in Europe and USA needs special attention as they feel alienated from their traditions. The problem gets accentuated as they are not fully accepted in the society and the government needs to be sensitive. Intellectuals, women, and youth must be encouraged to play a greater role in the social and political affairs of their land. The more democratic the world becomes, the less would be the threat of terrorism and suicide killings.

We in India are particularly concerned about terrorism as we live in a dangerous neighbourhood. The rise of religious fundamentalist groups in Pakistan like the *Taliban* and their increasing sway over Swat Valley and other areas clearly reveal that the Taliban and other fundamentalist groups like *Lashkar-e-toiba* *Jaish-e-Mohammed*, *Harkat-ul-mujahideen*, *Al-badr* etc. can be a source of serious trouble

in the entire region. In this backdrop, one expects Pakistani Nation State to act against these groups with determination and not to abdicate its authority.

Recently, we have come across writers who believe that we must not 'respect' those religions which have 'obnoxious' ideas. This could be misleading and cause conflict. The right attitude is to respect all religions but with a clear recognition that all religions are human creations and therefore intrinsically imperfect. We should therefore be in a position to change our beliefs in the light of new discoveries based on science and rationality.

While fundamentalist religious forces are likely to continue to dominate political discourse for some time to come, it is not likely to be a permanent feature of the world social and political order. As fundamentalism cannot satisfy growing human aspirations or meet the challenges of modernization, the present hold of extremist organizations over its followers in the Islamic world would gradually loosen and eventually recede substantially. We have strong mystical traditions in Islam that have found eloquent expressions in Sufi ideas and religious disciplines (to which Wahhabis and other fundamentalist groups are strongly opposed) that could be supported.

My sense of optimism and confidence that the nation-states would cooperate in elimination of terrorist violence from our midst make me believe that the menace of terrorism in its present form would become a thing of the past in coming few decades. As I have said before that this is not inevitable. The state-system, civil society organizations and concerned citizens have to take stronger action against terrorism. As I look into the future the challenge of removal of poverty, disease, illiteracy and inequality would, however, persist in the 21st century.

The movements of democracy, religious harmony, and good education need not be viewed as separate ideals or goals; these are interrelated. Creative minds, civil society institutions, and global political architecture need to have a unity of purpose. The future of harmonious living demands sharing of a perspective that accommodates different points of view and respect for the ideals of *Bahudha*.

At the same time, we have to discard the ideas like '*my god is superior to yours*', '*teaching hatred can secure national integrity*', '*using terrorist groups in pursuit*

of national goals' and dismantle infrastructure that *'breeds hatred and imparts training for terrorist acts'*.

Amidst all this, our task is to move collectively as human beings towards peaceful and harmonious living that demands both rationality and love. On our generation rests the responsibility to provide these elements. It is our duty to work together to inculcate the *Bahudha* approach in our society, religion, and politics. It is only through dialogue and working together, without sacrificing whatever is viable in our traditions, that the hope for a harmonious society can emerge. That is why I have tried to combine elements of history, philosophy and my own experience in this book.

I believe that my book *Bahudha and the Post 9/11 World* will speak in time of crisis. I hold that civilizations do not clash, savagery does. Viciousness, duplicity and lack of trust could be tackled through a dialogic approach and by cultivating an attitude of mind that embraces both listening and recognition of truths other than one's own. It is in this hope that *Bahudha* can make a contribution to a better world that I have constructed this book.

Endnote

1 See John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, Edition 3, Pluto Press, New York, 1999, pp 11-28.