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A PARASITIC RELATIONSHIP OF NATIONALISM & TERRORISM

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Abstract

Terrorism and nationalism are two elements which are always at loggerheads. These two entities have a wide philosophical and ideological base, which makes it a strenuous task to define the boundaries of these conflicting notions. To complete this strenuous task, these entities have been given an exclusive mention. Affording these specific mentions allow us to understand the boundaries of these ideologies. It is only after this understanding; we can understand the interplay between them. The eminent personalities of India have given their views on the same. There is a dearth of literature on the topic. However, an attempt has been made to encapsulate the parasitic relationship between them. The recent attacks on Pulwama we hope are solved by coming together of every citizen, realising their power in nationalism.

Keywords: Nationalism, Terrorism, India, Ideology, Muslim, Hindu, Religion.

Introduction

Terrorism: A Force to be Defined and Contained.

From time immemorial, no manmade force has posed a greater threat to the sovereignty and the integrity of nations than ideological warfare.¹ The world has seen ample bloodshed in the name of fame, notoriety and religion. What started out as peaceful demonstrations invariably acquires violent undertones. This threat has only intensified with the exponential growth in technology and advanced weaponry that has made it increasingly hard for law enforcement agencies to effectively detect and neutralise these threats. Such organisations have also exercised great restraint in ensuring that they do not pave the way for legal lacunae by attempting to define the scope of terrorism. However, legal bodies such as NATO, an alliance formed simply to ensure the mutual safety of its members has made a feeble attempt at this, defining it to be:

"The unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property in an attempt to coerce or intimidate governments or societies to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives".²

As in respect of the Indian perspective, in light of the run-in's the country has had with terror forces, it is clear that the courts have expounded at great length on what they understand to be terrorism. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has in the landmark judgement of *Madan Singh v. State of Bihar*³ adopted the definition as put forth by United Nations Official Dr. Alex. P Schmid which constituted that terrorism is nothing but:

"acts of terrorism veritably as 'peacetime equivalents of war crimes.'"

Terrorism has been understood to be the enemy of all democratic institutions, the rule of law and the very notions that the country as built upon. India has grappled with the issue of terror threats before but at no point had it become as grave as in the aftermath of these tragedies. Countless lives have been lost, infrastructural damage has been widespread but most importantly of all, fear mongering and creating doubts in the minds of people. Terror is inherently utilised as a tool to breed fear and paranoia and it is for this reason that radicals utilise these means to manipulate a very primal, primitive emotion that exists within all persons.

India has been the subject of Imperial ambitions from the beginning of time, owing to the abundance of its natural resources and the wealth to be found amongst its lands. It is thus no stranger to external and internal aggression. But following its independence in 1947 as a sovereign state, with the exception of sporadic incidents of rebellion and aggression, there has seldom been significant threats that have brought the conversation of terrorism to the table⁴. This however changed following the devastating destruction that ensued following the 26/11 attacks in the heart of the country- Mumbai. The attacks were well spaced out in hotspots of the city such as the infamous Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, The Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminal and the Trident Oberoi to name a few. The attack left

¹Dr. Ceaser Roy, *Anti-Terrorism Laws in India*, 154-159 (2018).

²NATO defines terrorism in the AAP-06 NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions, Edition 2014.

³(2004) 4 SCC 622.

⁴There have been significant attacks such as the attacks on Parliament in 2001 and the recent attack on the CPRF forces in Pulwama.



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behind a staggering death toll but more than the lives lost, it left behind irreparable scars on the psyche of the citizens of the country watching from their television sets, hoping that the long-drawn-out carnage to finally come to an end.

This attack lasted for an excruciating three days⁵and when the dust finally settled, the nation was contemplating whether their present laws and security fail-safes were really as robust as they had initially thought.⁶ It prompted amendments to the anti-terrorism legalisation already in force in the country by virtue of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2008⁷ and the creation of a governmental body to combat such aggression- the National Investigation Agency.⁸ The nation however continued to mourn and fear mongering and the whispers of conspiracies and incompetency hung in the air. It seemed like the country after a few years was finally on the verge of recovering when the attack on Uri occurred.

Uri, a small town, nestled in the terror-stricken area of Jammu & Kashmir which has been the subject of contention and civil unrest. The Indian Army has strategic installations and army bases spread across the state. Uri is of significant importance given its proximity to the Line of Control (LOC) which warranted an Army Headquarters in this location. The perpetrators of the Uri Attack brought weapons such as gun and grenades and attacked the facility.⁹The fires that these explosions caused resulted in the death of numerous military personnel and the attack sent shockwaves throughout the country, the people mourning the loss of their brave soldiers. The unintended consequence of the country reeling from the tragedies of the attack included the revival of a deep-rooted resentment for the country that was implicated as complacent in the attacks- Pakistan. This only served to strengthen the allegiance that was felt by the Indians and an attack on our first line of defense only sought to invoke our inner patriotism and loyalty to the ideals that the country stood for.

Nationalism and India: Capturing the Mysterious Spirit

Nationalism exists on a conscious level of a human being. It is a state of mind which signifies absolute loyalty to one's native soil, to its culture, traditions and defined territorial authority. The coin of nationalism has two sides, it can be a mandatory force or an extremely divisive entity. Historically, it has proved to be an immense source of strength for nations but also an arch rival to peace due to conflicting nationalities of different nations.¹⁰ Historically, in India, the concept of nationalism or 'traditional patriotism' could be precisely defined as a 'socially active sentiment to the attachment in land, language and cult' which bloomed even before the westernization of the country took place.¹¹ This largely felt sentiment erupted in various forms during the era of company rule and during the revolt of 1857. This sentiment was demarcated by our great leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak as he expressed Indian nationalism as a force of growth which became generalized and became a universal mission, aiming to achieve a destiny of brotherhood and freedom. This idea then became inclusive of heterogeneities in India such as cultural, political and religious values.

This sentiment is at the heart of constitution as Gopal Gandhi correctly observed that 'India is all Indians and all Indians are India.' Moreover, nationalism is not the creation of nations but the awakening of nations to self-consciousness. However, when love for one's country takes over the constitutional values or the principles of democracy, then the same becomes misplaced. This misplacement was defined by Sri Aurobindo as he observed in his writings that 'let no man dare to call himself a nationalist if he does so merely with a sort of intellectual pride, thinking that he more patriotic, thinking that he is something higher than those who do not call themselves by that name.'¹²

The differences and tensions which arise between Hindus and Muslims are mainly on the basis of cultural differences, terrorism, and the disputes relating to land of Jammu and Kashmir. The idea of nationalism seems to be stained from the conflicts that keep arising within these groups in the country. Maulana Madani an Indian politician and a member of parliament devised the concept of common nationhood for Hindus and Muslims in an undivided India. 'Muttahida Quamiyat' (composite nationalism) of all religions, he says that the idea of shared nationality forged by Jews and Muslims during the Prophet's time at Medina. Drawing from this

⁵Ibid.

⁶South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre (SAHRDC), New Delhi, Armed Forces Special Powers Act: A Study in National Security Tyranny, 22nd November, 1995, visit <http://www.lhrdc.net/sahrhc/resources/armedforces.html>.

¹⁰Ramji Bhimrao, Ambedkar, Pakistan or Partition of India, A Nation Calling for a Home, 1940.

¹¹Bayly, Christopher, Origins of Nationality in South Asia, 1998.

¹² Nahar, Suajata, India's Rebirth: A Selection from Sri Aurobindo's Writing, Talks and Speeches.



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ideology he states that all religions which are at conflict with each other can form a similar alliance. He went ahead with the idea of composite nationalism and defined the boundaries of Indian nationhood when he observed that:

“We the people of India have one thing in common and that is Indian-hood which survives all differences of religion and culture as out common humanity is not affected by differences of caste, attributes, colour and size. Similarly, the religious and cultural differences are no bar to our common nationhood. As compatriots we are all Indians.”¹³

Prafulla Chandara Ray, the father of Indian Chemistry, while speaking at the university of Jamia Milia, Aligarh, in the year 1923, expressed his views which claimed that India was a composite nationality, he observed that outsiders would claim that India has a heterogeneous population, but this heterogeneity has a composite structure and is unified with the golden thread of shared loyalty to the motherland. Hindus and Muslims by negating the negative elements and issues of smaller magnitude stand out by far the most pertinent. If these two characteristics of heterogeneity are held together, Indian nationality can be assured.¹⁴ Muslims may have come to India at later stages for different reasons but now that they have been in India for centuries and made India their home, their real allegiance lies here.

Bhagat Singh, our great revolutionary, many revere him as a brave heart of but few care for his views on nationalism. He has been reduced to be a freedom fighter or ‘martyr’, with less of regard to his philosophy. Bhagat Singh’s nationalism was contained in his rebelling ideas against untouchability, caste system and communalism. He went against the capitalistic ideology and did not envisage an India in which would be ruled by minimum percentage of elite Indians or native Indians. We can find the trace of this ideology in his explicit message to the youth in March 1931:

“...the struggle in India would continue so long as a handful of exploiters go on exploiting the labour of the common people for their own ends. It matters little whether these exploiters are purely British capitalists, or British and Indians in alliance, or even purely Indians.”

He was of the view that religion was not a compulsory requirement for nationalism.¹⁵

Although, the boundaries of nationalism cannot be defined precisely, these views of different eminent personalities come to the rescue to capture the mysterious spirit of nationalism beautifully.

Terrorism: A Threat to the Spirit of Nationalism

Acts of terror serve as the locusts of fear-mongering and in-fighting amongst the plethora of communities that exist among the landscape of the country. They allow for the cultivation and growth of insidious strains of contempt and bigotry and serve only to weaken our resolve as a collective unit and our shared identity as Indians. It allows for the radicals that lay dormant and, in the shadows, to emerge and foray into the open and further their agenda of disseminating hatred and unrest between communities that otherwise existed peacefully, despite the irreconcilable differences that may exist at the heart of their political or spiritual ideologies.¹⁶ Terrorism has most commonly been associated with acts of massive violence in the name of religious assertion. No other belief system has been more the subject of war and bloodshed than that of religion- it has been a bone of contention amongst people of different faiths and in a world where information is subject to manipulation and misrepresentation, it becomes increasingly hard for people to ignore the blatant attacks launched at their core belief systems. Evidence of this can be seen in the case of religious imperialism where suppression of one religion was evident.

Acts of terror in the name of religion however have an impact that eclipses statistics of body counts and damage estimates. It is an egregious assault to the psyche and social dynamic that is prevalent within a country and its individuals. It distorts our fundamental understanding of fraternity and our common cause that is the subscription to a higher loyalty to the country above all. It is a harbinger of fear and paranoia and usually has the intended consequence of people abandoning rational thought and instead awakening within them a bloodlust for vengeance, retribution and the need to allocate blame. In the aftermath of the tragedies that no doubt resulted in the deaths of many from different communities and nationalities, the country unites against members of their own political and social paradigm. The obvious consequence of this would be the sudden increase in hate-crimes, religiously motivated

¹³ Madani, Ahmed Hussain, Composite Nationalism and Islam, 1938.

¹⁴ Chandra Ray, Prafulla, Essays and Discourses, 2016

¹⁵ Singh, Virender, Bhagat Singh: Letter, Writing and Statements, 2018.

¹⁶ Gregory E. Maggs, Terrorism and the Law: Cases and Materials (2d ed., 2010).



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attacks and animosity amongst the different communities that earlier co-existed in harmony. It allows for instances of communal violence to occur and group membership is sacrosanct as opposed to complicity or rational thought.

When the dust settled after the violent attacks of 26/11 or the strikes in Uri, it became clear that the attacks were religiously motivated assaults, intending to delegitimise the prevailing government and its notions. The majority of terrorists schemes that have occurred or have been thwarted more often than not are attributed to Muslim extremists’ groups with a convoluted misrepresentation of the teachings of the Quran. Such terror groups have either claimed credit or through the process of tedious investigation have been found to be the perpetrators. It is often also uncovered that such terror organisations have their strongholds or are supported by our neighbour, Pakistan and they are usually found to be complicit in these acts of violence, despite their vehement denial. These revelations have forced Indians to look amongst themselves and make out their own brothers and sisters as a threat and enemies to their own differing ideologies. As with any tragedy, the nation seeks to blame anybody for the loss it has suffered and it becomes easy to point the finger at unsuspecting minority communities that are already within their social framework.¹⁷

The obvious result has been the uprising against people of the Muslim faith, inherent discrimination that they face as the nation heals and the attacks against Pakistani nationals. Following the Uri attacks, the country sought to ostracize Pakistani actors that were in India in pursuance of roles in Bollywood movies. Tensions run high and the country anticipates a pre-emptive, retributive strike against the transgressing nation. It is clear that there is immense pressure on the leaders of the nation for the same and if the government does not satiate this simmering desire, the people feel compelled to resort to vigilantism and take matters into their own hands.¹⁸ Fights break out, religious artefacts are defaced and the different communities begin focusing on their differences as opposed to what they have in common. It results in disintegration of our social structure and values as we know them. Bombs and grenades have the potency to cause more than just physical damage to life, limb and property. They have the capacity to deconstruct to psyche of a nation and its people from within, allowing paranoia and fear to take hostage.

All these reactions from the people only serve to undermine the basic tenants that this country was founded and built upon. By succumbing to actions that are driven bigotry and sectarianism, we fail to establish our loyalty to the Constitution of India and to what it signifies. It also ensures that the objectives that the terrorists set out to achieve are indeed fulfilled. We identify first as members of a certain social party or religious community as opposed to members of one collective, political and social unit- our identity as Indians before all other things. It is important that in such turbulent times, we do not descend into despair and seek out to allocate blame, point fingers or seek to alienate or single out members within our own system.

When a dangerous and powerful force has to be defeated it requires coming together of peaceful forces against the malignant entity. The easiest example of this is the Satyagraha, in which Mahatma Gandhi did not resort to Marxism, he went against the British rule equipped with principles of Indian philosophy. These principles are largely abandoned today due to the practice of attributing terrorist activities to a religion. The most reminiscent example is the brutal violence against Muslims in Gujarat in February, 2002, in which Muslims were killed in thousands for the reason that allegedly some Islamic extremists set fire to train carrying Hindu nationalists.¹⁹ This violence was a result of distortion of the correct nationalist ideology. Nationalism does not belong exclusively to one group or a particular religion. The preamble of our Constitution itself addresses the fact that our country is a secular country. Thus, when two religious group blame the acts of terrorism on one another and give rise to communal tensions, it tears apart the fabric of secularism which promotes brotherhood and peaceful co-habitation as ingrained in our constitution, and nationalism becomes an entity to be conquered.

British artist and writer captured it well when he said “let’s be cautious about narrow nationalism.” Even Mahatma Gandhi endorsed such ideas, on this front one of his famous saying goes as “Indian nationalism is not exclusive, nor aggressive, nor destructive.” When all religious groups as Indians are living together in a single country, the same very country should not be threatened by our own actions and if there is no large-scale cooperation among different religious groups then the idea of nationalism becomes redundant. However, it is interesting to see what happens when a culturally diverse country comes together, to sum this position briefly the words of Jessica Crispin, an intellectual, critic and an author do justice, her view are that:

“Nationalism tends to strengthen during times of struggle. Individuals fall on hard times, they find themselves suffering from unemployment or poverty or displacement, which causes self-doubt. People erase that self-doubt,

¹⁷M. Cherif Bassiouni, *Terrorism, Law Enforcement, and the Mass Media: Perspectives, Proposals* 72 *J. Crim. L. & Criminology* 1 (1981).

¹⁸Friedlander *Terrorism and International Law: What is Being Done?*, 8 *RUT.-CAM. L. J.* 383, 384 (1977).

¹⁹Mishra, Pankaj, *The Guardian*, *The Gujarat massacre: New India’s blood riot* (Accessed on 13.02.2019).



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or at least cover it up, by suddenly proclaiming participation in a larger project, the project of a nation. Their nation is great, their nation has a tremendous history, and so they are allowed to participate in that greatness, to possess it, to play a part in that tremendous history.”

In conclusion, the words of former Union Minister M.J Akbar sum up the very essence of the tussle between Nationalism and Terrorism:

“If you think that there is no intellectual or ideological answer to terrorism, then you are wrong. The answer to terrorism is nationalism. And this is true everywhere.”