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CURBING TERRORISM THE GANDHIAN WAY

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“What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?” **Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi**

The acts of terrorism, through out the history have been used as a method to frighten the adversary and put the opponent in utmost fear. Kill one and frighten ten thousand has been an age old Chinese proverb and the most suitable to describe the acts of terrorism. The crudest of the weapons, short of nuclear, have been experimented with; to curb terrorism, but none of them has delivered. Iraq has plundered into still thick of violence than it was before the United States’ invasion. Similarly the events in Afghanistan have proven to be more disastrous than profitable. The much famous and media hyped “Digging out Rat from the hole” as announced by the then President, George W. Bush regarding Osama bin Laden now seems to be only a hyped slogan of wishful thinking and nothing else. That is to say, “the War on Terrorism” has become a bone in gullet. Almost all the possible weapons have been tried to curb the menace; N number of Resolutions have been passed in the United Nations, Regional Organisations and at bilateral levels; harshest and stringiest of laws have been voted for at domestic levels but the threat has grown from bad to worse.

Terrorism is not one of the calamities which has erupted from nowhere with the spur of the moment. On the contrary this evil has grown and thrived over the ages on the nutrition of disparities evolved during the process of human evolution. It is not a single time event which is responsible for

the out break of the phenomenon of terrorism but a regular sequence of many developments paralleled and unparalleled in history.

Violence though always one of the recourse to bring justice to the society has hardly ever been able to liberate people or bring a conflict to its justified resolution. World History is full of wars and bloodshed. Right from the times of Roman Empire and even before that, the Kings and the Nobles have opted for War in search of a peace. Historians and analysts have gone as far as to say, that we should try to ascertain that what have been the causes for people not going to war during certain periods of human history rather than looking into the causes of the different wars. War is natural to Human species may it be the basic instinct of dominance or the ever increasing scarcity of resources. “War to end all wars” has become the punch line of the Super Power of today. “Collateral damage” has entered the columns of today’s news as never before. All this violence and bloodshed, after all, for whose sake? Killing and slaughtering of human beings in one part of the world either by armed security forces or by Mujahideens in casuals is not justified in any manner. A joint effort of 1857 also failed to yield the desired results. All this had led India into a hopelessness and disappointment. It was at this time when apparently a very weak-thin looking man called Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi appeared on the scene. He not only converted the Congress movement into a mass movement by his actions and words but was able to attract every Indian to play his or her part in bringing redemption to their country. Gandhi was solely responsible for bringing freedom to India

shall be too mean to be said. Nevertheless, his contribution in the struggle at the same time cannot be rated second to any one.

Terror for Mahatma Gandhi was in the minds of the people. It was not the strongest of men with arms who could intimidate the weak. It was a person who was strong on ones principles and in devotion for the cause which Gandhi thought could be a person to be feared. The strongest of the persons was who stood on the principle of truth and non-violence. When it comes to fighting the weakest but bold and truthful opponents the mightiest of the empires fail. This is not what Mahatma has preached, it is what he practised and demonstrated. He was of the firm opinion that the strength of a truthful person is as old as that of the hills. For Gandhi, Truth was God and God was the Truth. He often said in his meetings that there can come a time in his life when he may lose faith in the existence or strength of God but there can never be such a single moment when he starts doubting the credibility of truth. When Gandhi returned to India in 1915 from South Africa, India was on the threshold of a violent conflict with the British military might. If on one side Subhash Chandra Bose was organising Indian National Army in east, Gadhar Party leaders were busy importing weapons and ammunition to raise a violent revolt in Western India. The revolutionaries believed that British Empire could be defeated only by violent means.

Undoubtedly, Gandhi agreed with the Indian fundamentalists that British had no justification in ruling India and exploiting its people and wealth but still he was against using violence as a tool to drive away them. Gandhi said, "Two paths are open before India today, either to introduce the western principle of 'might is right' or to uphold the eastern principle that truth alone triumphs, that truth knows no mishap, that strong and weak have alike a right to secure justice."¹ While deliberating on the issue of terrorism in his book, *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi opines that all the conflicts should be looked into beyond the individuals engaged in it i.e. the larger issues which the people are fighting for. All the conflicts have two dimensions to it: the people and the principles.² Many a times people are fighting for the same cause but their views are different. So

Gandhi believed that it was better to fight the cause of terrorism rather than the terrorists themselves. Unless the root causes are eliminated terrorism cannot be. Different people shall again and again be adopting the same violent methods for espousing the same cause. Gandhi believed in addressing the issues which lay underneath the problems. He would have looked up into the issue of terrorism both from the sides of the State as well as the perpetrators. No one side is totally positive and no other side is totally negative. There are both positive and negative shades attached to both the parties and hence he would have tried to arrive at a compromise solution. War as a resort means that all other methods of conflict resolution have failed and sinking ones own self to the level of terrorists. Gandhi said, "The barbarous method is warfare, open or secret. This must be ruled out if only it is impracticable. If I could but persuade everyone that it is always bad, we shall gain all lawful ends much quicker. The power that an individual or a nation forswearing violence generates is the power that is irresistible. But my argument against violence is based upon pure expedience, i.e. its utter utility."³ The best and everlasting weapon for fighting injustice which Gandhi not only believed in but also practised tooth and nail through out his life was "Satyagrah". According to Gandhi, "Satyagraha is literally holding on to Truth and it means therefore, Truth Force. Truth is soul or spirit. It is, therefore, known as Soul-force. It excludes the use of violence because man is not capable of knowing the absolute truth and therefore not competent to punish."⁴

Family disputes and differences are generally settled according to the law of the love. The injured member has so much regard for the others that he suffers injury for the sake of his principles without retaliating, without being angry with those who differ from him and his actions, whether he resists or resigns, is always calculated to promote, the common welfare of the family. It is this law of love, which silently but surely, governs the family for the most part throughout the civilised world.⁵ Gandhi was against cooperating British in the Second World War as he was against violence. He said, "Violence attacks pot only the sin and evil but also the sinner and evil doer. This prevents the

realisation of unity with him/her and therefore is an offence against the great truth, the unity and sacredness of all being.”⁶ Though for Gandhi it was always the means that justified the ends and it was never the other way round yet for him violence was far better than cowardice. Non-violence was a weapon of the strongest of the persons not the weak ones. He justified acts of violence in certain situations like killing of a mad dog or the dog with the rabbies; or he never justified a silent spectation of an act of rape. Being a silent spectator made one partner in violence.⁷ However, responding to an act of terrorism already taken place and brought its toll is something different. In Hind Swaraj Gandhi emphatically made the point that violence never works as a response to violence. This leaves no difference between the attacker and the revenging person. Gandhi was strictly against the argument of justifying the acts of terrorism but was not against the person who indulged into this practice.

Relevance of Gandhi is not to be seen through the order of the day. What ever is being practised today may not bring the desired results. The leaders of the world have entered into the arena of mean and short sighted politics. Every one is in a race for securing ones own vote bank without bothering for the future of a state or the humanity. Authority, responsibility and accountancy have lost each others touch somewhere in between. This is not only true for the developing polities like India but has become a global phenomenon ranging from the least developed countries of Somalia- Ethiopia to the developed most of the states like UK and USA. An idea or a concept becomes all the more significant when it is missing in the air but very much wanted.

Gandhi had a firm faith in the principles of a true democracy, either those were to be used in family matters or the issues of international importance. Gandhi was of the firm opinion that we must be the change we wish to see. However, little but Transvaal and Phoenix were an attempt towards it. These farms were not only miniature self sufficient communities but also schools of self reliance at all socio, economic and political levels. Democracy was adopted as a faith and not as something political fashion. These establishments soon became nurseries of simple and disciplined

soldiers of peace armed with inalienable arms of non-violence and truth. In his opinion it was not the procedures or institutions which made a government truly democratic. Democracy is in essence based on certain ethics that the government should declare to achieve. Truth, ahimsa social, political and economic justice, communal harmony, tolerance towards the opponents, protection of minorities is the basic foundations of true democratic order. He defined democracy as to be such a government which does not mean the rule of the majority, but protection of the interests of even the smallest limb of the realm.⁸ Successful democracies rise from bottom to top and the modern day vanguards of democracy are trying to fit this instrument into such societies which, are neither yet ready for it and nor do have such capable parties which this type of system requires to be supported. Democratic system is not simply a matter of political installation of the government.

Had Gandhi been there today he would have never endorsed the idea of the US led coalition venturing into Afghanistan and raising an all out war against Jihadis for establishing the institution of democracy. The conflict is again between the different ideas and view points. However this is not to justify terrorism but to study it and understand it. Both the sides define their ultimate goals to be sovereignty and national self determination. One side names it to be a right to choose their own government through democratic principles while other characterises it to be freedom from outside influence and control. As both the sides have been sticking to these principles and to the guns a lot of destruction and bloodshed has taken place. In Gandhi’s view, “Just as a man would not cherish living in a body other than his own, so do nations not like to live under other nations, however noble and great the latter may be.” The whole world community is convinced at least in heart of hearts that it has lost its path of true development and modernisation but no one knows where the dent is to be made in search of lost waters. How ever nothing is lost and it is never too late. It was purely on the basis of his unshakable faith in the creed of truth and non-violence which made him take biggest of the decisions look so easy. Terrorism has been

defined as a violent act carried out for attaining a political purpose. Gandhi never approved of it even while it was his comrades in the same purpose who adopted the method of extremism. Gandhi's struggle was not simply aimed at freedom from the British imperial yolk but it was much wider and extensive. He aimed at getting the humanity and specifically his country men getting liberated from the curse of apartheid, suppression, discrimination, exploitation, poverty and violence. Freedom from the political control of British could have been got much earlier. One cannot think of harvesting a fruit from tree if one plants a noxious weed. As you sow, so shall you harvest, was a firm belief of Gandhi. "To use violence for securing rights may seem to be an easy path, but it proves to be thorny in the long run, those who live by the Sword also Die by the Sword."⁹

Gandhian method of resolving conflicts, grounded in poverty, unemployment, inequalities and communal violence, delve into non-violent resistance towards building an alternative social order. Gandhi wrote to Polak, his friend while describing the struggle in Transvaal against ethno racism, "In fighting the battle, we are presenting the Indian motherland with a disciplined army of the future; an army that will be able to give a good account of itself against any amount of brute force that may be matched against it."¹⁰ In Gandhi's opinion, the struggle of the Indians in Transvaal was the greatest of those times and if it succeeded, it would be not only triumph of religion, love and truth over irreligion, hatred and falsehood, but it was highly likely to serve as an example to the down trodden millions in India and to the people in other

parts of the world.¹¹ Mahatma Gandhi, the ever biggest apostle of peace walked on this planet Earth, when it was littered with bloodshed. The World witnessed two World Wars during his life time; partition of India was another episode of the largest bloodshed in his own lands. This is not to say that Gandhi was in any way responsible for these unfortunate events and neither to undermine his personality. This is just to understand that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was undoubtedly a success in his life time though the environment was antagonistic to his ways and means. Gandhi was a person for whom every bit of paper was a common resource of mankind and how could he ever imagine the wastage of such a human resource in the form of death and destruction. Wars begin in the minds of the people and a human mind is always in conflict over petty issues. It is the control and discipline over ones self and ambitions which is the ultimate ladder to ones peace of mind and eventually peace outside. Partition of India is an example when Gandhi single handedly saved the eastern India from the holocaust which was witnessed in the Western part of the subcontinent. Gandhi was neither armed with any missiles or nuclear weapons nor was he even unarmed. He was armed with time tested weapons of Truth, Love and Non violence. For Gandhi the winning record of these weapons was as old as hills and so was his belief in them. All he had done was to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as he could. Though Albert Einstein has said that the generations to come shall not believe that such a man in blood and flesh ever walked on earth, yet he shall continue to do so till these three cardinal principles (Truth, Love and Non violence) of his life do not loose their relevance.

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