Buddhist Teachings as Plausible Solution to Terrorism/Extremism

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"Hatred will not cease by hatred, but by love alone. This is the ancient law."

- The Buddha "the awakened"

Terrorism cannot be ignored; the physical and emotional damages inflicted by terrorists are painful, harsh and inhuman, and in several cases, the wounds and scars cannot be healed. Terrorists use violence to create fear in the minds of common folks and spread chaos in society. Citizens are terrorised with violence and are intimidated by inflicting pain; the terrorists exploit media to fan hatred and gain popularity using carefully chosen themes. A mockery is made of state authorities to make them look vulnerable, weak and defenceless. On the other hand, security forces are given a strict mandate by the nations to avoid collateral damages at any cost that ties them down with one hand at their back. States are thus left with limited options to counter the terrorism and have to make well thought through decisions to take on the militants. They need to uphold tactics and strategies to avoid any collateral damage and not invite any human rights violations and wean away supporters and sympathisers in the native population to the causes of terrorists.

It is well known that terrorism is a strategy in which terrorists use terror and violence as instruments to cause panic, fear and chaos in the societies, indoctrinate the impressionable and feeble minds with their ideology, and their ultimate aim is to cause complete paralysis of state machinery to achieve their political ends. Terrorists target individuals, leaders, groups and institutions as these are the soft targets rather than confronting the security forces, which are much powerful conventionally. In their strategy, non-combatants are targeted, and security forces are least engaged.

"Terrorism is the systematic use or threatened use of violence to intimidate a population or government thereby affecting political, religious or ideological change. Acts of terrorism are not intended to merely victimize or eliminate those who are killed, injured or taken hostage but rather to intimidate and influence the societies to which they belong."[1] State-sponsored terrorism, Religion-inspired terrorism, Right Wing extremism, and Nationalist Separatist terrorism are some of the prominent forms of terrorism. The most worrying challenge worldwide is religion-inspired terrorism. In the name of a particular religion, terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Hamas and Taliban come to everyone's mind these days. On the other hand, it is said that terrorism has no religion, and no faith endorses violence and fear.

The challenge in giving a detailed description of terrorism lies in the fact that it is impossible to be precise, not only because motivations, goals and strategies vary too intensely throughout the situation, but also because of the complexities of untangling the super lapping within any of those definitions. The term 'Terrorist' has never been approved willingly by any group or individual. According to Cindy Combs,

> "*Nowadays, terrorism is a phenomenon that is becoming a pervasive, often a dominant influence in our lives. It affects the manner in which governments conduct their foreign policy and the way corporations transact their business. It causes alterations in the role and even in the structure of security forces of the world. It forces us, the humankind to spend huge amounts of time and money to protect our public figures, vital installations, citizens and even our system of government. It influences the way we travel and the choices we make when we travel. It even affects the manner in which we live our daily lives. Our newspapers, radios and televisions inundate our every waking moment with vivid details of spectacular terrorist news from all corners of the globe.*"[2]

Terrorism acts are scandalising around the globe and defying rationality. In order to find a solution for these acts, the state needs steps outside rational reasoning. Since the 1980s, the percentage of violence committed in the name of religion has been increasing tremendously, and it has become a security challenge for every state in this world. The fear primarily is created by one religious' group towards the other. In India, religious fundamentalism is considered a major driver; with Hindu nationalism, Sikh separatism, Christian evangelism, and Islamic fundamentalism acting as catalysts or as primary forces for outbreaks of violence.[3] Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and other religions have constructed radical sectarianism of their own. Violent extremists exploit religious principles for their own needs.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the world has met with a resurgence of religious fundamentalism, radical movements and nationalist doctrines. Soon, religious fanaticism, Islamic religious ideology and right-wing extremism became the centre of research in

[1] Chhabra Meenakshi, Spiritual Empowerment and World Peace: Humanity Struggles against the Many Faces of Terrorism, Boston Research Center, Boston, 2001: 24.

[2] Cindy Combs, Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century, Prentice-Hall Inc., New Jersey, USA, 1997: 6.

[3] http.//en.wikipedia.org, Religious Violence in India

terrorism. According to Bruce Hoffman's definition on religious terrorism, they often seek the elimination of broadly defined categories of enemies and are undeterred by the politically counterproductive potential of indiscriminate killing.[4] Religion as such is the primary motivator which influences people to commit crime and violence.

With that as a backdrop, it is well understood that the state machineries and the governments worldwide are affected by terrorism and are in the process of finding the best responses to emerging challenges from violent extremism and terrorism. The ways and means are to establish societal orders that guarantee peace, security, and stability that do not support alienation of a particular group of people based on their religion, economic class, ethnicity, or colour, thus preventing extremism and terrorism. **Teachings of Buddhism towards love, compassion, and non-violence are possible and plausible ways that, once ingrained and established in the societies, will provide a solution to nip terrorism in the bud.**

Buddhism has immense potential as a source of ensuring successful peace politics and respecting humanity. In 1993, Johan Galtung published a book called *Buddhism: A Quest for Unity and Peace* in that he stated that the essential contribution of Buddhism in the creation of peace lies in its absolute rejection of direct violence: the doctrine of *ahimsa* that is of non-violence' (Galtung 1993: 117). Buddhism is meditation and selfhood and delves deep into politics and society, like any other religion. There are no sealed compartments, and they are intertwined. This inter-connectedness between religion and politics is reflected in Buddhist cultures through '*two wheels of Dharma*'. When Tibetan Buddhists face the philosophical dilemma of ahimsa vs himsa (non-violence vs violence), they frequently argue on two separate grounds, one of the ethical values, the other of tactical practicality. Thus, in one way, one might argue that they distinguish ideals from rationality (Goldstein Kyaga 1999: 32). They operate on two separate grounds because they believe that there are 'two Dharma wheels' running concurrently to protect and make society a liveable place. The 'two wheels of Dharma' have two sides of the community. One wheel belongs to the Buddha's teaching, the other to Ashoka, the righteous lord, or the head of state. His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, plays two roles: the spiritual leader and the other as a political leader for Tibet's autonomous region.

Interest in Buddhism is increasing worldwide, particularly by people seeking alternatives to rival the philosophies, fanatical confrontation and needless violence of the terrorists and extremists in the present-day world. Non-aggressive thoughts and actions are at the core of Buddhist philosophy. The first of the five guiding principles that all individuals should observe is "avoid killing or wounding any life form." Nothing in Buddhist philosophy or scriptures advocates the use of aggression as a means to resolve conflict. Buddhists have resisted to take up weapons in any condition or circumstance, even if they believe they would indeed be assassinated. The Buddhist guiding principle for monks' lives requires them to protect themselves, but bans them from killing, even in self-defence. Most importantly, Buddhism is a religion of true peace, and it has never promoted violence in the name of religion.

[4] Townshend, C. (2018), *"Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction",* pp. 97, Oxford, U.K

It emphasises compassion, humility and moderation. The art of peace should be practiced from the time you rise to greet the morning to the time you retire at night.[5]

In the name of religion, individuals can go to any extent to provoke people with unreasonable and irrational opinions. However, religion itself is not the source of extremism. "So, what is terrorism? It is believed that it is not the best question to ask; one can never answer it due to the monochromatic paradox of numerous definitions by state and scholars. The questions, such as, what are the circumstances under which terrorism is most due to happen? What are the causes of terrorism, its genesis, philosophy and modus operandi for unleashing the reign of terror? What are its political and aims? The answers to these questions on national or transnational terrorism or extremism or insurgency can be sought. The circumstances have much to do with individuals who become terrorists and create fear for the society where they live in. The extremists/terrorists often are identified to possess some common personality traits such as staunch psychological leanings towards faith, ideology, violence and terror and behavioural characteristics such as 'narcissistic anger,' and all these hues of their personalities have something to do with conditions they have been brought up such as belonging to a disadvantaged society or a society previously colonised or an under-represented group. And there are such other variables that, in tandem, trigger specific individuals to see extremism as a successful means of causing reform for their society rather than have a peaceful view of solving issues at hand.

From the period of 9/11, in the name of religion and ideology, groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS have been creating a commotion to influence people and change their thoughts of perceiving religion. Terrorism entails a severe breach of human rights, the brutal torture and killing of innocent lives, culminating in civil unrest. People, organisations or even governments can perpetuate the acts of terror for their benefit or bring peace.

The Buddha seemed to have no intention of establishing either a theological or political stance or community principle. Rather than a theologian, Buddha was a redeemer, a moral advisor and an educator on the road to Nirvana, which entitled: free from anger, confusion and terror. Buddha's teaching was Dharma: the road to salvation, where the five fundamental moral values that each person should follow are: not stealing, lying, using intoxicants, committing sexual assault, and not killing (non-violence). Non-violence is a necessity, and it is the first stage of the Buddha's teaching; it is also a psychological necessity for self-development. Enmity, hate and violence never improve our state of mind rather it contaminates the very essence of a living being.[6]

Buddhism is not merely a religion, and it is not even a practice of sheer belief, and because of the loyalty to a divine deity, Buddhism does not ask to follow its practices and teachings; instead, it teaches the why and how of the human existence while the individual goes through all of the stages to becomes a Buddhist. Therefore, the mere trust is overtaken and replaced by

[5] Morihei Ueshiba, The Art of Peace, John Stevens (tr.), Shambhala Publications Inc., Boston, USA, 2002 : 44.

[6] Fleischman, P. (2002), *"The Buddha Taught Non-Violence, Not Pacifism"* Barre Centre For Buddhist Studies, Available at: https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/article/the-buddha-taught-nonviolence-not-pacifism/

"respect based on logic and rational knowledge." *"Go forth, O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and men."* [7] Over the years, this teaching of Buddha has been accepted worldwide which teaches us about ahimsā, non-harming or nonviolence. The sheer idea of revenge and killing even in thought is rejected by Buddhism rather, it teaches forgiveness, love, compassion and tolerance. The Buddha said, "Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law." [8]

Buddhism does not quite bestow war and conflict. Nor does it allow Buddhists to put their lives in danger for their faith. In general, those who go to war, claiming that they have been serving their nation or religion, are mistaken. **The ethics of Buddhism and non-violence should be taught to young people, not as a faith or religion, but as moral education, to refrain from being or carrying out terrorist acts**. Vinaya Piṭaka teaches: Not to kill any living being, not to do any harm; not to take what is not given by the owner; not to commit sexual misconduct; not to make a false speech and not to drink intoxicants. The Buddha never believed that he could bring happiness and peace to the entire universe. In Buddha's mind, the hate amongst people and conflicts between states never occurred. He could only see suffering souls becoming boundless. The Buddha talks to us from his place in an infinite world in which our current efforts for peace are not victorious but everlasting. Nevertheless, he still opposed egotism or negativity and offered a realistic way to alleviate misery, to follow compassion to oneself and others.

According to Buddhism, the primary source of violence and revenge as unleashed by individual extremists or terrorist groups is the turmoil within the minds wherein the individual mind and the collective minds or consciousness have become replete with thoughts of being a superior race or superior religion and prejudices against state authorities and these minds have been indoctrinated with the idea that their cause is just and the only way to win their justified goals is through terrorist acts. Religious belief can turn into an ideology which is a worrying factor.

Faith in all religions, respecting all faiths and giving a say is what Buddha talked about. The world, according to Buddha, is interconnected and interdependent. Nothing can live on its own, and everyone depends on certain things. Any violence has its origin because of some causes and conditions. To resolve the conflict, it is crucial to restore the state's trust and authorities, remove the causes fanning the hatred and mistrust, and improve upon the conditions. One should live in harmony with everyone. John Galtung (1993), a Norwegian peace studies pioneer, explained the world is "precisely a process based on diversity in symbiotic (mutually influential) interaction." He explains peace is not a stable but a more complex system of a sequence of moving and juggling acts, an on-going struggle between our behaviours and the universe; hence, to attain positive peace, there should be justice in this socio-economic world.

[7] Vinayapitaka - Mahākhadhako – Mārakatha.

[8] Dhammapada - Yamakavaggo, v. 5.

And herein lies the positive approach as taught in Buddhist teachings of non-aggression, non-violence, compassion, following ethical values at one hand and simultaneously finding the best tactical and pragmatic solution on the other hand that may bring transformation in the individuals. Last but not least is to train the young impressionable minds who are inclined to join the ranks of extremism and terrorism to follow these teachings and bring them up correctly in their daily routine. The turmoil of the minds that gets manifested in the violence and terror acts by the terrorist can be best nipped in the bud by following Buddhist teachings.

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