

Multiculturalism, Modernity and Violence: Terrorism in North East India

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Social organization is always problematic from within and without, engendering various forms of action including violence in the process of constant adjustment of human beings to the internal and external aspects of its dynamic environment. A social action is considered either normal or deviant only in the context of a social organization in a given space and time. An act of violence may, therefore, refer to either of the states of social action depending on the different contexts of its incidence. Originating from endogenous as well as extraneous sources the incidence of violence has prevailed in various degrees, forms, magnitudes and dimensions at different levels of social organization in/among the human societies of all times. The highly organized form of violence or terrorism having existed in the historical times, too, (Sahi 1996:60) and emerged recently as a matter of serious concern all over the world is a common, widespread socio-politico-psychological phenomenon prevailing in most of the contemporary societies, particularly in the multicultural societies/ situations, such as Burma, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, South East Asian nations, Cyprus, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Yemen, UAE, Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, South Africa, Uganda, Zaire, Zimbabwe, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Haiti, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Surinam, Venezuela, Corsica, Italy, North Ireland, Sardinia and Spain. The fact here poses a question: *What patterns of the relationship between multiculturalism and violence are emerging in the modernization of societies, particularly in the multicultural India in the making of a nation-state?* The problem is being attempted with reference to the terrorism in North East region of India.

Theoretical Formulations

In sociology as well as in political science, the concept of the term terrorism has, indeed, yet to get a complete, widely acceptable definition. Lacquer has noted 109 definitions of the term between 1936 to 1986. In the Oxford Dictionary (1996) it is defined as “The use of violence especially for the political aims” while Raina (1996) noted that “Terrorism is the method or theory behind the method whereby an organization, group or party works to achieve its desired aims through systematic use of violence.” Anti-Terrorist Act 1985 (Government of India) defines a terrorist as “a person who indulges in wanton killing of persons or in violence or disrupting means of communication essential to the community with a view to putting the public or any section of the public in fear, affecting adversely the harmony between religions or different races, coercing or over-awing the Government established by law or endangering the sovereignty and integrity of India”. The terms such as terrorism, extremism, militancy, insurgency and revolution that are often used interchangeably by different scholars have certainly a little difference of meaning.

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From political stance, terrorism being based on a group's goal in order to achieve political aims or get something from a government by force is used more in the international context whereas the militancy is more common in the national context; insurgency being of more locally based and sporadic nature mainly involves ambush, assassination of leaders or community heads, kidnappings, extortion, etc. to get fulfilled some local demands involved with a community in a particular region. Like its definition, the types of terrorism, too, are identified by different scholars variously. Wilkinson in his book *Political Terrorism* drew a distinction between four types of terrorism; namely, criminal, psychic, war and political terrorism (Singh 1996: 84). Similarly, K. B. Raina (1996) and Vidya Bhushan (1996) also identify the diverse kinds of terrorism such as individual terrorism (rapes, robberies, murders, kidnappings, etc.), group terrorism, state terrorism, revolutionary terrorism, political terrorism, criminal terrorism, narco-terrorism, constitutional terrorism and international terrorism. The favourable background conditions of terrorist activities either exist actually or are perceived to exist such as political frustration and economic disparities (Raina 1996: 122). Parveen Kumar (1996: 71) broadly divided and sub-divided the terrorism into ideological (political and religious) terrorism and criminal terrorism like mafias and similar groups. Terrorism emerges in a society where social, economic and political injustices are meted out by the administration (Mehra 1996: 215).

In India the terrorism of the radical nationalists for the political goal of *swaraj* (self rule) has been marked during the British rule. Even after Independence there emerged various ramifications of political or ideological terrorism in the form of communist violence in Telengana and West Bengal (1948-50), Naxalite violence in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and some other parts of the country (1967-72), militant activities in Jammu and Kashmir, and political terrorism at its peak in Punjab in the form of Khalistan Movement in early 1980's. As in other developing countries, the principal cause of the rise of terrorism in India is the existence of socio-cultural, politico-economic, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversities and their self-consciousness (Tiwari 1990) combined with economic deprivation, political oppression, poor job opportunities (so called strong centre -periphery relationship) and relative deprivation among the ethnic groups (Bhushan 1996: 329) and vexed by the acts of oppression and repression such as humiliation of the masses, soft attitude towards criminals, wrong policies of the government, deprivation of the basic human rights and poverty among the people, unemployment, black marketing, public corruption, bribes by responsible officers and so on (Kumar 1996: 70-74), foreign support, liberation of fellow terrorists and lure for publicity (Sehgal 1996). To achieve their goals terrorists create a fear psychosis among government officials and their supporters through the activities like (i) killing carnage of people or bus and train passengers, and bomb and grenade attacks on civilians in markets, railway stations, cinema houses and public gatherings; (ii) looting of public funds, banks and organizations; (iii) destructive activities such as hijacking of planes, burning of bridges and buildings, derailment of trains, desecration of holy places and destruction of public and private property; (iv) intimidation, extortion and kidnapping of businessmen, film stars, officials, security personnel or their family members for ransom, blackmail or coercion; (v) assassination of public figures and perceived opponents including informers; (vi) attack on police patrols, outposts and armours and (vii) murdering of security personnel and /or their family members (Raina 1996: 119-23; Rastogi 1988, 1993: 20-21).

The definitions, types and conditions as mentioned in the literature do map out the concept, magnitude and genesis of terrorism, but only in a discursive, limited political manner wherein the variously based types are so mixed as to provide no logically complete typology. To understand it, one needs a comprehensive, sociological treatment of its definition and typology. Terrorism, then, refers to a social action of an actor oriented to a goal by terrifying the other actors with violent means for his/her optimum gratification from disruption of the given material and normative conditions in a situation. This definition sheds light on various elements of an act of terrorism such as actor/agency, goal, extent/other actors, means, consequences/disruption and conditions. Hence, its typology on the basis of agency (individual and group/state), goals (socio-cultural, political, economic, ideological, constitutional, war, etc.), extent (local, regional, national, international and global), means (rapes, robberies, murders, kidnappings, etc.), consequence (psychic, anomic, criminal, anarchic, etc.) and conditions (actual as well as perceived social, economic, political, religious, ethnic and other conditions of deprivation, inequalities, oppression, suppression and other injustices).

Broadly, the four paradigms (sociological, political, social psychological and anthropological/culturological) are discerned to emerge out of the discussion of the studies attempted to explain the phenomenon of terrorism; viz., (i) Anomie Paradigm, (ii) Centre-Periphery (Marxist) Model, (iii) Relative Deprivation Approach and (iv) Cultural Pluralist Approach. Merton's (1975) anomie paradigm considers terrorism the rebellion or anomic state of society emerging out of the gap between the cultural goals and the institutional means in which an individual rejects the both and replaces them with his own innovated ones in the process of his adaptation to the norms in a society. Feeling relatively deprived of the institutional means to accomplish the cultural goals and frustrated with the existing social organization the individual rebels against it to establish a system of the accessible cultural goals and the technically efficient means. The centre-periphery (Marxist) model (Frank 1975) of terrorism explains that the strong relationship between a centre and its peripheries leads to the relative deprivation, exploitation and impoverishment of the peripheries in the matter of resource utilization, employment and development. The peripheries experience a situation of inner colonialism wherein they are weak and helpless to exert for an equal right of resource utilization against a strong centre (negative reference group) and this frustration gives rise to terrorism in the peripheries. The relative deprivation approach was developed by Merton (1975) and applied largely in various studies of social problems in sociology, political science and social psychology. It refers to the relative deprivation as a gap between expectations and perceived capabilities of a person vis-à-vis his economic situation, political power and social status in relation to others (Gurr 1980). The cultural pluralist approach (Phadnis 1990; Smith 1986) emphasizing the dominant-subordinate patterns of interaction among various cultural groups in a comparative perspective attempts to determine the relative significance of cultural pluralities for social order and political stability in a society. In a culturally divergent society constituted by the co-existence of various groups with their mutually incompatible social structures, value systems and belief patterns, the structural requisites of a political order leads to the subordination of one group by the other ones characterized by domination, separation, instability, dissensus, conflict and, extremely, by terrorism. None of the theoretical paradigms is independently adequate to explain the social

problem of terrorism. Rather, each paradigm compensates the other ones. Therefore, a combination of these four paradigms is generally applicable to explain such a problem.

Multicultural North East in the Making of the Indian Nation-state

India as a whole has 4635 communities comprising 2000 to 3000 caste groups- about 60000 synonyms of titles and sub-groups and near about 40000 endogenous divisions (Singh 1992: 14-15) formed on the basis of religion, sect, language, race, tribe, region, sub-culture, symbols, tradition, shared history, creed, minority status, ritual, dress, diet, boundary, national origin, or some combination of these factors (Hutnik 1991; Rastogi 1986, 1993). North East India depicts cultural plurality of almost all Indian varieties of life styles, cultures, languages, religions, beliefs and traditions. The four factors; namely, tribe, caste, language and religion form the motifs of the cultural plurality in the region. According to the Census Report (1991), in all 213 tribal groups comprising 25.77% of the total population are distributed variously over the eight states (Sikkim is going to be a member of the North East Council) of the region such as Arunachal Pradesh-101 (63.7%), Assam-23 (12.8%), Manipur-28 (34.4%), Meghalaya-14 (85.5%), Mizoram-05 (94.8%), Nagaland-20 (87.7%), Sikkim-04 (22.4%) and Tripura-18 (30.9%). The non-tribal/caste groups are found only in the plains of the region, particularly those of Assam, Tripura and Manipur and in Sikkim as a whole. India has 1652 mother tongues and 18 scheduled languages in the constitution. The North East has the speakers of each of the scheduled languages, though from the region are included only Assamese and Manipuri. Besides, the tribal groups and sub-groups speak about 400 languages and dialects distributed over Arunachal Pradesh-168, Nagaland-95, Manipur-87, Tripura-100 and Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram-200 (Gopalakrishan 1995). The Hindus followed by the Muslims are concentrated in the plains of the region. The Christians are 85% in Mizoram, about 60% in Nagaland and around 40% in Meghalaya (Dubey 1978; Rastogi 1986, 1993; Hutnik 1991).

The people's resistance to the making of the Indian nation-state in the region has a sufficient, long historical legacy right from the times of the British regime in India. The various groups have had their territorial autonomy in the past as well as their association with their brothers in China, Myanmar and Bangladesh across the border. The British Government of India either left them to live isolated in the Inner Lines or crushed them with might to serve their interests. After Independence the Indian government has subsequently adopted the policies ranging from the military action to the political persuasion to the developmental deal for the region. During the nation-state making amidst the multicultural diversity the region has undergone the innumerable inter-ethnic conflicts and the immense violence of multiple terrorist groups posing the greatest hurdle in the modernization through social, political, economic and normative formations of the regional extent.

Patterns of Terrorism in the Nation-state Making in North East India

During the process of nation-state making or modernization in the region the gradually increasing violence, and particularly terrorism, has emerged as a major response to it. The various patterns of terrorism in the region have existed simultaneously or subsequently in the contemporary times; viz, (i) anti-state terrorism, (ii) state (security forces') terrorism, (iii) ethnic terrorism, (iv) nativistic (sons of the soil) terrorism, (v) criminal (across border) terrorism and (vi) foreign (ISI) sponsored/backed terrorism. The North Eastern violence has always been concerned with a

people's mainly locality based demand either for a sovereign state in their particular geographical location or for a state within the Indian constitution (Samanta 1994), or, recently, to preserve ethnic identity and to wrench out economic gains in a particular community. The terrorist and insurgency groups in the North Eastern India doing violence on a large scale in the recent times are the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) and the Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) in Assam, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) in Manipur, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in Nagaland, the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) and the All Tripura People's Liberation Organization (ATPLO) in Tripura, the Hills National Liberation Council (HNLC) in Meghalaya and many other ones burgeoning continuously on the multi-ethnic base.

In North East the problems of Assam state are very complex and different from those of the insurgency problem in the other North Eastern states. A continuous in-flow of the immigrants from across the international borders, galvanized native identities, ever increasing ethnic consciousness and decreasing life chances are responsible for vexing its problems. On the basis of the range of their demands and nature of violence the ULFA (separatist) can be taken as a terrorist organization and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) and the Karbi National Volunteers ((KNV)-both seeking internal autonomy- as the insurgency groups in Assam. In November 1990, the ULFA and the NSCN were both banned and brought under the Disturbed Areas Act in the respective states of Assam and Nagaland by imposing the president's rule.

Multiculturalism, Modernity and Violence

Seemingly, the modernization/nation-state formation- of a multicultural society breeds violence/terrorism of various groups instead of establishing a rational order based on their mutual consent. But actually modernity and violence do not have any essential relationship of concurrence or antagonism. The process of modernization of a society brings the people under a generalized normative order and a universalistic value system on the principles of secularism and egalitarianism along with or without liberty and democracy. The task becomes tougher in a multicultural society where it faces the issues of diversity, equality and justice. The cultural diversities clamour for as well as are used as the resources for opportunities amidst the inequalities of material facilities, political power and social prestige and the injustices meted out in the operation of their dominant-subordinate relations. Here, the subordinate groups perceive the modern culture, dominated by a few groups, as being imposed upon their particularistic cultural identities and relatively depriving them of resources. Thus, the dynamics of modernization, and not the modernity, leads to friction, conflict and, finally, terrorism in the societies. The possibility of ethnic violence cannot be negated even in modernized societies. To some extent the people cherish, celebrate and reinvent their identities in these societies also as the scientific instruments of modernism cannot resolve all the issues of ultimate ends of life. Elimination of the violence in the making of a nation-state needs statecraft with a vision. Jawaharlal Nehru did display a statesman's vision in his policy for integration of the tribal people with the Indian (constitutional) mainstream and at the same time for empowering them to preserve their cultural identity from the reckless forces of change. Their participation in the society at large realized through internal autonomy does accomplish the goal of modernization and protect them from reckless oppressions but not without any danger of secessionism in view of the same ethnic groups occupying the territories and interacting equally with the community brothers

across the boundary (international border)-the hot bed of external interventions far away from the centre of the Indian political society. Then, only a cautiously monitored Nehruvian social policy that visualized self-governance, development and integration of ethnicities can work a relatively peaceful modernization/nation-state formation in the multicultural societies like India.

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