

The Menace of Terrorism

Terrorism, as a method to achieve political aims has gained worldwide popularity. The terrorists, it is alleged, are financed and trained by the powers which are hostile to India. In the case of Punjab, Pakistan, it has been established beyond doubt, has been playing the ugly role. The terrorists are trained in Pakistan and then equipped with weapons before they are sent to India. A large quantity of ammunition recovered from the Golden Temple at the time of Blue Star Operation proves Pakistan's role. In the earlier days Mizos and Nagas were trained by the Chinese. Investigations of some of these have disclosed that it has been very easy for the terrorists to get in and out of the country; India has become unbelievably permissive. It implied that grafts and massive pay offs to some who have been manning security must be involved. Thus terrorism is closely linked with corruption.

Terrorism sprouts from political frustration as well. When some political parties are defeated at the polls and fail to rally mass support they resort to such methods. They are generally financed by the foreign powers. Such terrorists think that they can coerce the government and so the people to submit to their demands. They take the responsibility of killing some and for creating unstable conditions.

The main aim of the activities of the terrorists is to create conditions which may necessitate a change in the political set up or create law and order problem for the government. Disturbed conditions will check progress and people are sure to lose confidence in the people in power. Working of democracy will become difficult and the interested foreign powers may fish in the troubled waters. So terrorism is anti-democracy, anti-people and anti-progress. The government has to curb such activities by devising suitable methods. India can learn much from others' experiences in this respect.

When organized and large scale terrorism first struck Western Europe about a decade ago the nations were shocked. Terrorist groups like Germany's notorious Baader Meinhof gang, Italy's Red Brigade and various Palestinian organizations were initially successful though caused a great havoc. But after the initial surprise and shock plans were carefully devised to counter the terrorists. Units specially trained to deal with the terrorists were set up. Thus the British have their Special Air Service (SAS) which a few years ago in most spectacular anti-terrorist action stormed the Iranian Embassy in London and rescued 10 hostages killing five of the six Arab terrorists. The West Germany also has an effective unit called GSG-9 which was responsible for the equally sensational rescue of 87 hostages on a Lufthansa jet at Mogadishu in 1977. Israeli Commandos executed a similar feat

at Entebbe in Uganda. The effectiveness of such anti-terrorist squads has partly been responsible for the gradual decline in terrorists' activities at least in Western Europe though the problem has not yet been licked. There was a time when many Europeans seriously felt that the terrorists threatened the democratic system and the way to tackle them is to suspend some of the rights at least temporarily. Council of Europe's report on the defence of democracy against terrorism says, "Terrorism aims to overthrow and destroy pluralist parliamentary democracy and halt the scope for free political, economic and social development. Terrorism could in certain circumstances prompt states to take legislative, judicial or administrative measures that might pervert the very character of democracy. In the face of this threat we need reassert our conviction that democracy must overcome terrorism while remaining true to itself."

The experiences of Western Europe in this respect, are relevant to India. An SAS type commando action at the Golden Temple much before June, 1984 – perhaps immediately following the gunning down of the D.I.G. of Police Mr. Atwal – might have caused much less loss of lives and also avoided the terrible trauma of subsequent events.

Terrorism in Punjab exhibits many faces and should, therefore, be tackled at various levels. Along with the gearing up police and intelligence the external environment in which the terrorists operate must be set right. At the political level if there is resumption of the political process and eventual restoration of the popular rule in Punjab, terrorists would be alienated. And with political stability we will have economic progress.

There is also the psychological and the emotional aspect of the problem which in many ways, meshes with the economic and the political. Psychologically speaking the feeling of alienation has encouraged the terrorists. Indeed quite a few who may strongly disapprove of the terrorists and their methods still have a sneaking admiration for them largely because of their feeling of alienation. There is no leader among the Sikhs who is bold enough to condemn terrorism, they fear losing popularity. The most important thing is that democratic right should not be prostituted to perpetuate terrorism. Moreover, terrorism cannot be finished with appeals or appeasement; it will have to be dealt with greater force and strength.