

# TERRORISM

## A New Mode of Dehumanizing People into ‘Targets’

Mathew Attumkal♦

### 1. Introduction

The twentieth century (1900-2000) witnessed two world-renowned figures who were also contemporaries. Both had a powerful influence upon the world. But the means they adopted to influence the world were entirely opposite. Indeed, the philosophy of life they proclaimed was such that the course of history chronicled a number of offspring to their ideologies. The first one was Adolf Hitler (1889-1945). To mount the stairs of power, he literally followed the way of terror and might. The net result of his thought-pattern gave birth to a notorious event in the twentieth century described as World War II (1939-1945). He followed his philosophy to the hilt, which resulted in nothing but the blood and tears of millions of human beings. Diluted in the culture of assassination and mixed in the flavours of hatred and chaos, Hitler dreamed of a world of vain-glory by making humans as enemies to each other and degrading them to a level of mere means or targets. The second figure was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, fondly called Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). He too had a philosophy of life blended with the jewels of truth and non-violence. He had an uncompromising attitude to his principles and the corresponding result was that of a bloodless struggle for the freedom of a nation, and of love, peace and everlasting joy in the hearts of millions and millions of humans. Uplift of the human dignity was his sole aim. *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all) was his secret and sacred *mantra* for glory and success. He believed in the culture of inter-human and intra-human relationship<sup>1</sup> and love was the powerful

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<sup>1</sup>Inter-human relationship is built upon the principles of love and respect and it exists between or among the humans. Intra-human relationship is also based on love and respect but it exists within the humans alone. It is centred on the principle of sacredness of one's own life and that of the other. That is to say, intra-human relationship never permits one to become a suicide-bomber, which causes destruction to oneself and one's own fellow humans. Likewise, inter-human relationship paves

weapon he used. According to Abdul Quddus, “Hitler worshipped power; Gandhi believed in Truth and Love. The conflict between these two ideas is as old as history. Here, the world conquerors stand on one side, the apostles of human brotherhood on the other and it still continues to be so with no reconciliation in sight.”<sup>2</sup> The greatest technology the world has ever seen is the advance of human life creatively and purposefully. Ignoring this fact is as ignoring the very life of oneself. Therefore, any venture to depersonalize a human being, at the cost of lifeless means, is like a global fatal ‘kidney failure’ spreading fast, challenging all human institutions and technologies. Are we ready to undergo a dialysis of human nature?

## 2. Historical Recordings of Dehumanization Process

History of humans is also a history of dehumanization. Most of the religions place humans immediately after the deities and as collaborators or the beneficiaries of their works.<sup>3</sup> Thinkers have no difficulty in accepting humans as rational and relational beings. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) placed humans in the kingdom of ends. “He who contemplates suicide should ask himself whether his actions can be consistent with the idea of humanity as an end in itself.”<sup>4</sup> Strange to say, there has been an exploitation of the rationality and the relationality of the humans not from without but from within and there have been some unfortunate events in human history, through which humans were treated as mere means. To begin, let us first clarify the concept of dehumanization. It is an evil mode of treating humans in a manner less than their status as persons. In a wider sense, getting angry with another, not giving other’s due, calumny, etc., come under dehumanization. In a strict sense, dehumanization happens due to the manipulation or wrong interpretation of certain ideologies and

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the way for a person to respect the other as a person and not as a thing or means for one’s end.

<sup>2</sup>Abdul Quddus, *The Mirage of Terrorism*, Delhi: Amarnath Pages, 2003, 343.

<sup>3</sup>The Jewish and Christian view of humans is oriented to a certain amount of divinization of the humans. God has created the humans in His image and likeness and has given him dominion over everything (Genesis 1:26). The Hindus believe in the principle of *atman* (individual self) that proceeds from the Brahman (Absolute Self) as convoying in each human being. The mystics of various religions speak with authority of an indwelling principle, that the Indians call *Antaryamin* (indweller) residing in the cave of everyone’s heart.

<sup>4</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Ethics*, trans. Thomas King Mill Abbot, Delhi: Orient Publication, 1987, 56.

beliefs. Hindu caste system in ancient India is the best example for dehumanizing a section of people who were labelled as untouchables. Birth was the sole determining factor to decide one's personal as well as social fate. Similarly, slavery was yet another method humans have used to dehumanize themselves. Wealth was the determining factor between a slave and a master, so much so that humans were considered no better than powerful beasts. A subtle form of dehumanization that existed in ancient Rome was the man-beast fight. Many were 'victims' for the pleasure of the aristocrats by being competitors with animals.

Looking at history from this perspective should remind us that human history is also a bundle of tears and curses of a number of innocents. Another distinct form of dehumanization is seen in the thoughts of Frederick Nietzsche (1844-1900) who classified people according to their intelligence and spoke of a master and slave morality.<sup>5</sup> History also proves that dehumanization has existed based on sex, colour, creed, false belief, employment, power, myths, etc. The present form of dehumanization emerging from the evils of terrorism is, however, a matter of global anxiety. Nations are sidelined; human intelligence is baffled and the modern technology is thoroughly exploited by a small margin of humans who are termed as terrorists. For them, every human, whether innocent or crooked, man or woman, child or youngster, is a 'target' for achieving their imperial end. That is to say, humans are used as a means for fulfilling their autocracy. This reduction of humans as targets by the terrorists to achieve their warped intentions has been furthered by the increase of modern mortal weapons.

Terrorism is a planned but unpredictable mode of violence pitted against all, devoid of concern for the innocent or crooked. Fretting and fighting are used as the tools to attain their objectives. Though the birth of this destructive method cannot be extracted chronologically, its infancy can be seen around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC when rulers of Rome and Greece would terrorize those who did not pay the taxes, by putting them into crackling flames. Guerrilla form of terrorism is recorded in the life of the Chinese general Sun-Tze (c. 350 BC).<sup>6</sup> The ancient Greek historian

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<sup>5</sup>Frederick Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, in Mortimer J. Adler, ed., *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 43, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 2003, 533-535.

<sup>6</sup>*New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1977 Edition, vol. 8, s.v. "Guerrilla Warfare," by Robert Brown Asprey.

Xenophon wrote of the effectiveness of psychological warfare against enemy populations. Terrorist movements in Palestine during 66-73 AD had been regarded as one of the first terrorist movements in recorded history. Another major terrorist movement of the world was the ‘society of Assassins’, which was active during the medieval age. The leader of this movement was Hasan-e Sabbah (d. 1124).<sup>7</sup> He realized that his group was too small to confront the enemy in an open battle and that a planned, systematic, long-term campaign of terror carried out by a small disciplined force could be the most effective political weapon.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the terrorist movements of the twentieth century that are founded upon the principles of mass destruction constitute a different variety as it is wedded in the ‘parliament of cannibals’, consummated in an ‘illegal union’, and conceived in a ‘devilish womb’. ‘To depersonalize and deteriorate the beautiful creation of the Lord’ is their fundamental principle. The value of human life is, thus, dependent on the decision of a few powerful persons. Are we today the silent supporters of such a monopolized history?

### 3. Terrorists and Targets

Terrorists are classified into various categories. However, a most acceptable form of classification is found in the study of Paul Wilkinson,<sup>9</sup> for whom international terrorists are of the following five classes:

- Nationalist terrorists: mainly for political purpose
- Ideological terrorists: to change a system
- Religious fanatics: to overthrow what one considers as evil in one’s or other’s religion
- Single-issue fanatics: to change a policy within a targeted society
- State-sponsored terrorists: done as a matter of state policy

The above classification shows that every terrorist group has an issue, which is a *target* for them. But the agony is that to achieve these dreaming targets, they convincingly forget the victims of their targets who are the innocent children, ordinary men and women, who are destined to journey not under bullet proof car, who live their daily lives by the sweat of their brow and who happen to come under the decisions taken in air-conditioned rooms and to live amidst an intoxicated atmosphere. In other words, the

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<sup>7</sup>*New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1977 Edition, vol. 7, s.v. “Fatimids,” by Bernard Lewis.

<sup>8</sup>Quddus, *The Mirage of Terrorism*, 7.

<sup>9</sup><http://wwwnew.towson.edu/polsci/ppp/sp97/terror/variety.htm/>

real targets are not the issues which they stand for but the lives of thousands and thousands of human beings. Therefore, we can say that *the target of a terrorist is himself and the other* and the unpardonable sin of a terrorist is of the double effect of dehumanization. First, they dehumanize the innocent as targets and, second, they dehumanize the members of their own group.

#### **4. The Orbit of Terrorism and the Process of Dehumanization**

We are living in an age of spacecrafts and satellites moving in the orbits. We are also aware of the catastrophe they may cause by deviating from their orbits. Figuratively, the orbit of terrorism is nothing but the agenda for which the terrorist stands and the deviation is caused by the use of evil and destructive means to achieve it. As long as their 'satellites and spacecrafts' are in their orbits, they are not terrorists. But even a slight manipulation of their devices can bring forth tremendous destructions to the world and its inhabitants. Such destructions are grouped into a threefold form of paralyzes. They are cosmic paralysis, ethical paralysis, and economic paralysis. According to Lee Griffith, "Terror is not a rational phenomenon. It possesses people, body, mind, and spirit. In the extreme, it even disables the so-called 'fight or flight' response and leaves people 'paralyzed by fear'... An entire dissertation on the small chance of being hit by lightning is of little comfort to one who genuinely has the fear."<sup>10</sup>

##### **4.1. Cosmic Paralysis**

It denotes the paralyzing of the entire cosmos due to the vulnerable activities of the terrorists. Every terrorist activity is a form of degrading the cosmos. The cosmos, the habitat of life, is degraded into *thanathos*, the place of death. Think of a human being. Even by not doing anything directly to a person, he/she can be easily dehumanized, precisely because he/she is also a cosmic being. For example, when we do something to pollute the fresh air, it is a direct killing of the cosmic order; indirectly, it makes my fellow humans and myself suffer in a wretched manner, so much so that the perpetrator receives a free membership in the process of dehumanization by paralyzing the cosmic order. Are we also shareholders in this process? Moreover, sowing the seeds of disorder and discontent has

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<sup>10</sup>Lee Griffith, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God*, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002, 6.

turned to be the work of a number of ‘psychosomatics’. In such a situation, dehumanization of precious human lives is the price we pay for the existing cosmic paralysis. The cosmos is a divine gift, which is given as a peaceful dwelling place for all humans; by paralyzing it, humans are deprived of its intended use.

#### **4.2. Ethical Paralysis**

A paralytic is the one who has some form of defect in performing spontaneous or normal actions of a human being. Such a person has an inability to move, act, or operate in a normal manner. By formulating a new law of morality rooted in the principles of destruction and dehumanization, the terrorist takes control of the ethical order of a society and produces people of a defective conscience and fractured morality. It is a signal to every member of a well-formed conscience to act against the evils of this universal crime. Abdul Quddus has reviewed this ethical paralysis in the following manner:

The terrorists are devoid of any love and benevolence and are disinterested in truth of life. They do not like to cultivate any art, literature and music. They prefer darkness of nights to the light of the day. They like their hiding places more than one loves one’s home. They do not even love children, and often kidnap them for claiming ransom. They can make a married woman a widow even after a few hours of marriage, turning every morning darker than night for all times to come.<sup>11</sup>

A diagnosis of this moral depredation focuses also on humans in many parts of the world longing for peace and tranquillity. Being wedded to their ideologies and idiosyncrasies, two and two seldom make four in the lexicon of a terrorist. Abortion of peace and person is the sacred *mantra* they chant at dawn. “What one cancer cell is to human body, terrorism is to human society. Terrorism begets a sense of horror and disgust deep in the people’s mind which may cause psychotic tendencies in a section of society. This section is sure to turn highly problematic for the entire human race.”<sup>12</sup>

#### **4.3. Economic Paralysis**

This fosters the weakening of the economy of a nation. However, the economy of a nation does not include its material wealth alone. It deals

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<sup>11</sup>Quddus, *The Mirage of Terrorism*, 36.

<sup>12</sup>Quddus, *The Mirage of Terrorism*, 5.

with all forms of wealth such as man-power (human resource), money-power, power of nature (natural resource), intellectual power, aesthetic power, creative power, etc. Thus, in short, economic paralysis affects all types of wealth without which human life would be impossible. In earlier times, most people were content with what they had. Sacrifice was a psychic pleasure for many. Nowadays, people want to enjoy what they do not have and sacrifice has turned out to be a medium for corporeal pleasure. Consequently, the sacredness of sacrifice is used as a 'divine tool' to extinguish a race. The earlier concept of *sacrifice of one's pleasure and comfort for the other* is often bypassed for *one's own pleasure and comfort*. Some even cross limits to achieve things, which stand beyond their reach in achieving what they want, and that too, at the cost of all moral codes, and divine and natural laws. The outcome of this human greed is economic paralysis. Humans are the greatest economic asset in the world. Extinction of a section or all of them for one's 'self-proclaimed principles' is equal to the destruction of the whole cosmos.

## 5. Critical and Creative Responsibilities

### 5.1. Collective Responsibility: Global Do's

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) once said: "Society is a troop of thinkers, and the best heads among them take the best places."<sup>13</sup> The conventional belief of 'the best head' is of somebody who thinks creatively, if not critically. However, following the increase of terrorists and their net works, there exists a hermeneutic of suspicion in the thought-patterns of such 'best heads'. The tendency to label others as 'sick' is a powerful syndrome among some of them. This sickly attitude to persons also guides them to view their lives as something 'to be used'. Under the title 'best head' they create worst atmospheres. They forget the fact that the premises of life are always very few. They are hesitant to live it meaningfully and beautifully. All the same our 'web age' frequently reminds us that to have success in life one is to be a bit artful because life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises. Gifted with brain and beauty, humans alone possess the power of deducing such conclusions with the faculties of memory and thought. Therefore, human race shoulders a collective

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<sup>13</sup>Cited in Quddus, *The Mirage of Terrorism*, 357.

responsibility to stimulate its Universal Conscience in favour of life and life-supporting measures and to oppose the growth of those phenomenal ‘best heads’.

### **5.1.1. A Transition from Targets and the Non-Targets**

Whether we speak of targets or non-targets, both pinpoint the humans and other living beings that live in the world of terrorism. Strictly speaking, all humans come under the title ‘targets’. There is no non-target. A section of people could be a target for a terrorist group and the followers of their ideology would be a non-target for them. But we are also living in an age that is marked by the presence of so-called counter-terrorists for whom the members of a terrorist ideology are mere targets for instant cremation. What a fun it must cause! Humans are guided by false ideologies rather than principles of life, by man-made weapons rather than God-given powers of love and peace, by the powers of annihilation rather than sustenance, and by the market value rather than a paradise of worth. This is a most destructive signal to the world. That is to say, the world (of humans, plants, and beasts) is bifurcated into targets and non-targets by both terrorists and counter terrorists or by people of opposing ideologies. For them, all living beings are nothing but a point of ‘target’. No superiority exists for human being. The degradation or dehumanization of all humans as one among the living beings and as someone who is destined to become a target for others challenges the dignity of humans and whispers in their ears the chants of ‘fight or flight’. Therefore, a conscious transition from the victim of target to a victor of human dignity is to be ensured by the coming together of all the people of good will.

### **5.1.2. Cultivation of a Spiritual and Moral Quest**

Human beings are endowed with various types of quests. We are addicted to natural thirst, which will be quenched by water. When Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997) listened to an inner voice, “*I Thirst*,” during a train journey to Darjeeling, a town in the slopes of the Himalayas, in 1946, that was a thirst for human dignity and social order. Intoxicated with the thirst for the Absolute, St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) left everything and chose the way of absolute poverty. There is yet another form of thirst that resides so powerfully in many humans and that is the thirst for revenge and destruction which can be termed as a



*thirst for blood*. Similar thirst is seen in the tragedies of Shakespeare.<sup>14</sup> It is a notorious thirst that one is dreaming of the destruction of the enemy and does anything to satisfy it. However, the present form of this thirst is a bit dangerous for the whole world. By annihilating mostly innocents, one's revenge is expressed, might is exposed and 'value' is highlighted. This is the precise reason that the culture of terrorism is penned as a by-product of annihilation. To gain momentum to one's precepts and principles or ideologies and ideals, one is ready to bulldoze and boomerang any amount of people and to inflict any degree of injuries to humanity. At this juncture, a spiritual and moral thirst alone suffices as a fitting remedy. Moreover, a spiritual and moral sense can be developed only in a rational human being.

## **5.2. Individual Responsibility: Personal Do's**

We experience natural calamities like flood, earthquake, tsunami, etc. All these destructive elements would be able to cause a break in the smooth functioning of the cosmos. Humans had created beautiful roads and palaces in the world; but they could be mercilessly wiped out in an earthquake. Now, nature cannot do any reparative acts to make those roads and palaces in their original condition; rather we need the intelligence plus hard work of humans and their machines. This situation of nature seeking for the assistance of human hands and heads teaches us a great lesson that many things could be sorted out by personal effort and individual initiative. A personal word and deed could count a lot for singing the funeral band for terrorist operations. Such a personal effort demands the following responsibilities.

### **5.2.1. Know Thyself**

A counterpart of terrorism in the modern world is abortion. Both are rooted in the principles of burial. Selfishness-cum- dehumanizing mentality provides license for abortion: abortion of human lives, rights, hopes, freedom, etc. Condemnation of innocent lives to death is the motto of abortion. Similar, too, is the case in a terrorist attack. Appreciation of oneself as a human being would alone help one to respect and admire others as humans. The corresponding dictum here is

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<sup>14</sup>In the play "Macbeth," Shakespeare presents the character Lady Macbeth who plotted the murder of Duncan, an innocent King only to advance her husband's career.

the saying of Socrates (469-399 BC) borrowed from the oracle of Delphi: “Know Thyself.”<sup>15</sup> If we go through the annals of human heritage, many have been wiped out, many have had to coexist with sufferings throughout their life, and a few have been fortunate enough to be elated pushing back all the barriers. There has been an eternal conflict between man and nature. But, in course of time, man has succeeded in discovering many ways and means to overcome the natural obstacles. In spite of the innumerable discoveries, human fate rests on the brink of uncertainty even in this age of advancement. The reason for such a situation is the conflict between man and man. Knowledge of oneself and others, therefore, is a must in this era of destruction to cease the conflict.

### 5.2.2. Learn to Live and Not to Die

Konrad Lorenz in his book, *On Aggression*, speaks of biological and behavioural explanations for killing or enmity. According to him, most species possess behavioural analogies to morality, which helps them prevent killing the members of their own species. They cultivate inhibitory behaviours like submission, appeasement, or affection to choke out aggression taking place in one’s own species. He found out that a human social organization is similar to that of rats, because like humans, rats are social and peaceful beings within their clans. However, they are veritable devils towards all the fellow members of their species not belonging to their own community.<sup>16</sup> Konrad’s study proves that there is a dangerous and aggressive side in every human being. It also does not rule out the possibility that there is yet another side to the humans from which flows the streams of mercy and compassion ending in an ocean of love. Learning the ways that lead to these streams and ocean is a *tapasya*, a constant teleological effort. In other words, a happy and peaceful life is an art. In spite of the forces that pull us back to our death instincts, a rational being alone listens to the voice of his inner being and learns the *mantras* of success.

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<sup>15</sup>This saying is inscribed in the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Plato in *Protagoras* (343b) ascribes it to the seven wise men. Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in Mortimer J. Adler, ed., *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 6, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 2003, 55.

<sup>16</sup>Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression*, trans. Marjorie Kerr Wilson, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1974, 237.

## 6. Conclusion

Walter Laqueur, chairman of the International Research Council of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, once said: "Terrorism is like pornography. No one can really define it, but everyone recognizes it when they see it."<sup>17</sup> It is true to a certain extent that our inability to understand the evil impact of terrorism will only be clear to us, as and when our near and dear ones become a victim or part of it. *Terra*<sup>18</sup> is a gift of God. Then, instead of terrors and cries, joy and peace should prevail among humanity. Any act that haunts the sacredness of our mother earth has a hammering effect upon her children. Therefore, terrorism is against the routine of the *terra*. Again, the mode of thinking in all humans is not the same. This is the irony of the so-called 'kismet'. All wrongs are right in terms of terrorist thinking. As a result, they silently proclaim a dehumanizing dictum that 'all empires have been cemented in blood'. Violence and torture, therefore, are used as the 'modus operandi' for their activities. So much so, they convincingly forget the cost of human blood. Every drop of blood is precious and even if gold, which has high monetary value in the material world, were passed into the human veins instead of blood, life could not be sustained. Blood is not manufactured and purchased but is what is received by birth. Therefore, every dehumanizing activity which becomes a crime against human blood is a disrespectful act towards the creator (the giver of human blood) and oneself (the receiver of it). It is said: 'Scratch any ideologue, you will find a terrorist'. Terror generating attacks are like lightning and thunder. Every lightening is followed by thunder. What is most harmful: lightening or thunder? Certainly, lightening! That is to say, the very act of sowing the terror is as great as the lightening that could provide electric shock to any being, whether humans, beasts, or plants.

Terrorism, being a man-made problem, human beings themselves should solve it. Therefore, what is important is not minimizing terrorism but uprooting it, because compared to all other modes of dehumanization, it is the most destructive form. Despite the destructive impact, terrorism can be uprooted. As Jacob Riis insists, every single effort to check terrorism is of great value: "When nothing seems to help,

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<sup>17</sup>Cited in Griffith, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God*, 8.

<sup>18</sup>It is the Latin term for the earth.

I go and look at a stonecutter hammering away at his rock perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred and first blow it will split into two, and I know it was not that blow that did it – but all that had gone before.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Cited in Quddus, *The Mirage of Terrorism*, 394.