

## **TERRORISM: MASKED AND REAL FACE** **(The Spark, Vol. 1 No. 1, August 15, 1987)**

Terrorism is a political strategy which uses violence as a tactic to generate fear, tension and to make the security system ineffective. The social and political impact of terrorism is alarming out of proportion to the actual physical damage caused. The following are some of the myths attached to terrorism.

**Myth 1:** Terrorism is considered by its proponents as a substitute for political agitation or mass mobilisation. Its rationale is that terror offers the only means to destroy the power structure of the modern State and bring about necessary social and political changes.

**Reality:** The proponents and practitioners of terrorism ignore the socio-economic, political and historical factors which do into making of social and political movements. Terrorists do not have the patience to mobilise the masses for a long-drawn political struggle. This struggle involves patience and intense suffering. Terrorists are, therefore, cowards. The psychology of the individual terrorist, cut off from his socio-political base, gets distorted, and terrorism becomes an end in itself. To confer the status martyr on him is to make a mockery of the long tradition of martyrdom in Sikh religion.

**Myth 2:** Terrorists describe themselves as freedom fighter and guerrillas.

**Reality:** Whether of the ultra left or the ultra right variety, terrorists are basically neo-fascists. Instead of fighting for freedom, they impose their frustrations and ill-conceived political tactics on the people. Terrorism is nothing but an instrument which ultimately leads to an anti-democratic and fascist society rather than liberation and freedom.

Guerrillas are irregular soldiers who fight war with far superior and strong enemies. Terrorists choose to attack far inferior, weak and defenceless civilians, old men, women and children. Terrorism is deliberate and systematic murder and maiming. It is a total war on humanity and human values.

**Myth 3:** Terrorists project themselves as social reformers. A recent campaign of the terrorists in Punjab still going on in some areas of the State, seeks to put an end to social evils like dowry, drinking, smoking, etc. using even physical force.

**Reality:** The social reforms campaign is a farce; it is only a ruse to win the support of people who are against these social evils. The use of the ruse undermines the democratic freedoms of the people; the campaign has caused migration of people from Punjab. The terrorists' use of force in the reform campaign has isolated them from a large chunk of even their sympathisers. For example, dowry is a social phenomenon. It has wide acceptance among the lower and middle strata of society as having social value. Any attempt which does not have its basis in an alternate value system is bound to be counterproductive, specially if it relies merely on terror.

**Myth 4:** Some of the people involved in terrorism believe that it is a law and order problem. They believe that by physically eliminating a few individuals terrorism can be checked.

**Reality:** Terrorism has only increased after all these tough measures in Punjab. Terrorism is the result of an environment of intolerance, insensitivity and alienation caused by the specific nature of socio-economic development. It thrives on the excessive use of physical force and frequent misuse of para-military forces to resolve politico-economic crises.

It is interesting to note that even ordinary crimes are clubbed with politically motivated terrorist activities.

Ordinary crimes, committed by smugglers or arising out of rivalry between political factions or parties and even those committed by agents of foreign powers, are all bracketed together and attributed to terrorists. This gives the public an exaggerated idea of the terrorist strength.

Many of these crimes on closer investigation will be found to have been committed for reasons that have nothing do with terrorism. Corruption in the police system and lack of alertness by intelligence have prevented them from being investigated into.

These crimes have to be differentiated in order to identify the correct political, administrative and ideological strategy to combat terrorism and also to gauge the real strength of the terrorists. It may also help to minimise the terror of terrorists caused by clubbing all these crimes together.

**By P.K.**