



Valour and Terrorism

PeaceWorks Ideas for the Classroom



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Whose Valour, whose terrorism?

In 2014, a group of historians on the West Bengal state-government appointed secondary education board, found themselves in muddy waters. Class 8 History textbooks in the state syllabus referred to freedom fighters from Bengal, Khudiram Bose, Jatindranath Mukherjee and Prafulla Chaki as ‘terrorists’ in a chapter titled ‘Revolutionary Terrorism’. An *India Today* report cites a historian declaring the use of such a descriptive ‘anti-national’ and as re-affirming the colonial perspective against freedom fighters. The historians on the education board defended their choice by claiming that the words ‘terrorist’ and ‘terrorism’ were historically accurate and gave a clearer impression of the historical context.

KEY CONCEPTS.....

VALOUR: Valour is broadly defined as bravery in the face of great danger. The term is usually applicable in the context of conflicts, battles, wars. However, the use of the term could have deep political implications, particularly with its ability to justify certain actions and reactions under the garb of bravery. This is primarily because one person's bravery might not be equal to another person's, as each person is placed in a distinctive position, with the crosscutting influence of multiple power structures, thereby making the meaning and experience of oppression or subordination not a homogenized one, instead one that is distinctive to each person's position in the social fabric. Thus, what is bravery in one person's context might not hold, and in some cases also mean quite the opposite for another person placed in a different social context.

TERRORISM: The Oxford Dictionary defines terrorism as 'the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims'. However, this is not a constant definition and is very subjective, because it is primarily based on the context, thus, making it particularly difficult to establish a singular definition. While the term terrorism invokes immense negative reaction, it is crucial to read terrorism as a product of social processes and not as something that emerges and exists in vacuum. The key problem is that terrorism is difficult to distinguish from other forms of political violence and violent crime, such as state-based armed conflict, non-state conflict, one-sided violence, hate crime, and homicide. Thus, blurring the lines between these different forms of violence.

REVOLUTION: Revolution refers to radical, transformative change and has many generic uses, as exemplified by the 'industrial revolution' to the 'sexual revolution'. As a historical process, 'revolution' refers to a movement, often violent, to overthrow an old regime and effect complete change in the fundamental institutions of society. After the French revolution of the 18th century which deposed the monarchy and attempted to refashion society from top to bottom, revolution became synonymous with the radical overcoming of the past. (Neitzel. L, 'What is Revolution?')

PROPAGANDA: There is much debate about what the word propaganda implies. But as a brief introduction, propaganda usually stands for deliberately biased or misleading information, that is politically motivated as a means to propagate and promote a particular point of view. It primarily suggests that the information content of the message, and its reliability as evidence is suspect, and not of high quality.

The term originally referred to a committee of church officials called the Congregado de Propaganda Fide— Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, with the aim of combating the Reformation. It was earlier assumed that the word propaganda did not have any negative connotation. However, it is most likely that it would soon have taken on negative connotations for the Protestants who became aware of what the word meant to the Catholics, because the committee had the purpose of advocating a particular biased point of view, and siding with one group on an important issue of church doctrine, with the committee having an interest at stake in doing so. It is during the two world wars that the word propaganda invoked strongly negative connotations, with both sides labelling the opposition's opinion forming activities as propaganda and treating these activities as primarily composed of lies (Walton, 1997).

ACTIVITY 1

One man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter!

One person's bravery could be another one's terrorism?

Giving the students a list of acts of dissent across the spectrum from the smallest acts to the more violent forms of dissent. How would they classify them as either valour or terrorism? In the process, discussing that these are not watertight terms, but often very fluid, making it difficult to point it out as one or the other.

- 1] The 49 signatories for the petition to the central government to take firm steps in checking lynching cases.
- 2] The formation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in response to the increasing marginalization and targeting against the Tamils in Sri Lanka.
- 3] The actions of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) in response to the excessive state pressure against Rohingya Muslims in forcing them to leave Burma, thus being subjected to major ethnic cleansing.
- 4] Students being labelled anti national and charged for sedition for protesting against social evils impairing the country

LABELS.....

Labels have always been one of the most significant tools of propaganda politics because they carry the inherent potential of defining personalities or events in ways most convenient to the power holders. Usually, an incident that goes with the grain of the existing state fabric, is labelled as valour. Whereas, the very same incident would invoke the terrorism or anti national label if it challenges the existing state structure and politics. Thus, the main idea is to not accept labels at face value, to be conscious of the politics driving those labels, and finally to accordingly question its usage, particularly in the case of these all encompassing ones, which can completely make or break a personality and an incident alike.

Both valour and terrorism are products of social processes and do not emerge or exist in a vacuum. While the first serves the purpose of glorification, the latter is aimed at shunning and othering. It is also crucial to note how one is the complete contradiction of the other, thus creating two extreme entities with no spectrum in between, making the scrutiny even more critical in unpacking the politics of labelling.

The concept of terrorism requires much critical analysis, moving away from blanketing it as the be all and end all of any conversation. Instead, it should be opened up to greater discussion and dialogue to unpack the processes that could lead to the development of attitudes that could later potentially be labelled as terrorism. In many cases, it is years of complete neglect and oppression from the state that drives communities further away from the state in the most radical ways. Put in a desperate situation, they feel so alienated that they are convinced that taking to violence and completely rejecting the existing structure is the only way that they can make their demands and voices heard.

Finally, it is important to ask what specific meaning do these labels acquire when used with women, because of the distinctively gendered implications. One common example in most of the Modern Indian history teaching in schools is that of Rani Lakshmibai and how she bravely fought the British with her child tied to her back. The last detail about having her child with her through every moment of that struggle, thus being the devoted mother to her child, plays a crucial role in building the valour narrative around her personality in popular memory. The immediate question emerging from that is how the personal life of a freedom fighter accentuates her valour in the case of a woman, that surely would not have been the case for a man. In fact, for a man it could have

generated quite the contradictory reactions, invoking the idea of being less devoted to the struggle of the nation if he chose to have his child with him. Thus, tarnishing his valour. So the very same act could invoke completely contradictory views on their bravery and devotion to the nation's struggle, thus having history remember them very differently.

ACTIVITY 2

Let's pick some newspaper headlines to some of the key events that have occurred in the recent past from different news agencies. We will then juxtapose them to analyse how incidents are reported differently by different news agencies, to try and trace how the headlines push a certain kind of agenda. What does this have to say about how we choose labels— is it a neutral process at all?

'2016 JNU protests were outcome of a well-planned conspiracy: Chargesheet'
—*Times of India*, January 15, 2019

'2002 Gujarat riots: I feel liberated and at peace, Modi after court verdict'
—*Times of India*, December 28, 2013

'Afzal Guru's hanging: Move on, and make India terror-free'
—*Rediff.com*. February 9, 2013

'"Now that Article 370 is gone, I can go back to Kashmir"'
—*ANI*, September 27, 2019

'Why Modi's Kashmir coup threatens India's democracy'
—*The Guardian*, August 10, 2019

'Citizenship Amendment Act: Hindu refugees from Pakistan hail PM Modi, Amit Shah'
—*India Today*, December 13, 2019

FREEDOM FIGHTER?

To put it simply, a freedom fighter is one who is struggling to bring freedom to a community, state or a nation as a whole from an authoritarian power holder, which could be both internal or external. The struggle usually comes at great cost with them having to put themselves through immense hardships and dangers. This in many cases would lead to giving up their lives because nobody would happily want to give up power and the struggle is usually very violent.

But in reality, this definition is far from being as black and white as it appears on the surface. There are several questions that have to be addressed in this context. First and the most important one: who fights whom, and for whose freedom? Is freedom for me the same as freedom for you? Is it only always about bravery, will power and intelligence or is it also about privilege in one form or the other, because can one struggling to even meet the basic necessities of life take up and participate in the greater cause of the community or the nation? Yet, despite the privilege, they willingly give up everything for the cause of the greater struggle. What distinguishes a revolutionary from a freedom fighter, a freedom fighter from a terrorist?

A crucial long standing debate has been the pitting of the roles of Gandhi against that of Netaji in attempting to establish one as the real player in bringing freedom to the country over the other. Sugata Bose, a prominent historian and great nephew to Subhash Chandra Bose has argued that the differences between Netaji and Gandhi have been exaggerated by the people. While their means differed significantly, they were united in their aim. He further states that their parting in 1939 was temporary and marked by deep mutual love and respect.

‘The saint’s holiness had to be complemented by the warrior’s sword, as Aurobindo Ghose had argued three decades ago, in the pursuit of justice and righteousness.’ (Bose, 2019)

Both played significant roles in standing up to the colonial powers, each performing a distinctive role in pushing the anti colonial movement. Bose believed in the necessity of using force against the British imperial

power and was not convinced of Gandhian methods of non violent agitation in standing up to the might of the British coloniser. He was instrumental in leading the Indian National Army, raising the rebel groups including those involving women in taking up force in their aim to oust the British colonizers from India, leading such expeditions particularly into the North Eastern part of India. While Gandhi's methods have been described as being revolutionary in responding to British heavy handedness, his call for non violence, non cooperation, satyagraha, Swaraj as key elements of a homegrown revolution, as opposed to emulating the Western idea of it, caught the British off guard, finding them unprepared for an adequate answer to the large scale resistance under his leadership.

Bhagat Singh is a difficult name to miss in the context—from a string of Bollywood actors through the years, to local bus stop hoardings and public gardens—Bhagat Singh's name has been in wide usage. So much so that, as recently as 2017, eighty six years after his execution, two student political factions in the Punjab University focused their election campaign around the figure of Bhagat Singh with one remembering him as a nationalist, and the other remembering him as an *inquilabi* (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/fighting-over-legacy-was-bhagat-singh-nationalist-or-revolutionary/story-CT6ZjCibpXUByqBafpU-UgO.html>).

ACTIVITY 3

● 'I am writing from within the labyrinth of this Gulag known as U.S.P-Marion. According to the U.S. government, I am in this concentration camp because I am a "terrorist," an "incorrigible and notorious criminal." There are those who argue that one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter. My position is that I am a freedom fighter and a prisoner of war. Why do I not consider myself a terrorist? Because I was born a colonized subject, and as such I have an inalienable right to fight for my nation's self determination, for its natural drive towards democracy and justice, its search for freedom and truth, and for the human rights of the Puerto Rican people. The fact that I was born a colonized subject was an accidental matter, because I, like all other human beings, was not given the choice of selecting my birth place. But the fact that my place of birth was accidental does not exempt me from my responsibilities to fulfill my patriotic duties and obligations. And one of those duties is to fight, by any means necessary, for the liberation of Puerto Rico, so that, as a nation, my people can exercise their right to self determination and national sovereignty. Ninety-one years of colonial domination has denied my people that right. Had I chosen to ignore the fact that Puerto Rico is a militarily occupied colony of the United States, and accepted the life that Uncle Sam imposed on me, my masters would have considered me a "good" Puerto Rican. Had I chosen such a path of ease and "least resistance", my conscience would have grown limp; I would have become a pariah and thus become something less than a human being. It would have meant a negation of any possibility to achieve self-realization. Had I accepted the kind of life that had been dictated to me by my colonizer, I would have only aped, emulated, and internalized his behavior and way of life. I would have become, in other words, a "good" slave. But I'm a "bad" slave. I chose to fight for the freedom of my nation. And it is that choice which has brought me to Marion, where I am forced to live in a state of helplessness. But my conscience and my will to fight and resist are as strong as the guayacon, that tree of the tropical forest known for its hard and longlasting wood.'

(Rivera and Headley, 1989 p. 162-163)

What do you think of his account? Based on this account, how would you view his role in the struggle? How can this account then be made relevant in the context of the Indian freedom struggle?

In the light of the above discussion around the overlapping contours between a freedom fighter, a revolutionary and a terrorist, followed by the first hand account from a different spatial context, what do you make of those three categories? Are these watertight or are they largely determined by vantage and context? For this, draw a pen portrait of any of the three Indian leaders, to bring out the layers within the narratives of their valour.



ACTIVITY 4.....

- 1 Discuss the role of Gandhi as the freedom fighter who led the country through some of his distinctive methods, leaving the colonisers unprepared to face up to the resistance they posed
- 2 Download the report from link below and share in the classroom
<https://www.asian-voice.com/Opinion/Columnists/Hari-Desai/Godse-as-an-alternative-to-the-Gandhian-ideology>
- 3 DEBATE: **Godse as an alternative to the Gandhian ideology!** using the cartoon above



What makes a revolution and a revolutionary?

Based on the earlier description of what a revolution means, a few examples here will help further clarify its distinctive character and what sets it apart from any and every other war, conflict, struggle. Some of the biggest revolutions historically have been the French revolution, the Russian revolution, the Industrial revolution to name a few. The term revolution implies rejecting the status quo—the complete over turning of the prevalent structure, system, and the ideas underpinning it, and replacing it with a new system of thinking.

The French revolution completely turned the prevalent order and structure on its head bringing the end of the rule by divine rights, that is the Ancien Regime, and bringing in its place a new social structuring based on the vote by the people and the Constitution. This was all based on the three fundamental principles of liberty, equality, fraternity that shaped every sphere of life, from politics, to state structure, architecture, education, culture.

ACTIVITY 5

Who is a revolutionary then? Are all freedom fighters revolutionary? Does the participation of such leaders mean that the struggle can be defined as a revolution or is revolution something else?

Let's listen to '*Aye Bhagat Singh tu zinda hai*' by Kabir Kala Manch.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INk-z01ILWs>

KKM was charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in 2011, two of its members were arrested after a crack-down by the Anti-Terrorism Squad. Why do they invoke Bhagat Singh? Thoughts?

Can you think of some revolutions that have shaped or reshaped society? Do you see aspects of what could be defined as terrorism in another context play any role in bringing about the revolution?

Terrorist: The term as a weapon for delegitimisation?

Using the term terrorist immediately implies the delegitimisation of anything and everything which that entity stands for. However, this is not to try and justify with acts that qualify as terrorism at any point, but to be conscious of how we use and receive that label, particularly now when every person who resists and questions the state is labelled as a traitor, an anti national, or a sympathiser of terrorists. So, this is a term that needs to be unpacked for what it tries to hide as opposed to what it brings out to the surface.

Historically, many resisting groups that have at a later stage been branded as terrorist organisations emerged in response to neglect from the state, the state forcefully silencing their voice, arbitrary oppression against minorities, violation of their fundamental rights, and large scale persecution of minorities. This has been the case in Mali, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and closer home in Kashmir, to name a few.

One might then ask, what allows the state to carry out such acts of oppression and violence, without being subject to consequences that would otherwise check such illegal acts.? To that end, Charles Tilly shows that the real power of the state lies in being in possession of the power to carry out all such oppressive acts as legal under the garb of protection of the larger interest of the populous. Thus, the state is the only legitimate user of violence in the name of protection. It is this power of the state that then creates the space for the emergence of communities who would resist such unchecked use of power and extreme suppression by the state. The state, in most cases without trying to engage with the oppressed groups and their reasons for rising in resistance against the state, would blanket their behaviour as those representing terrorist tendencies that would further draw away these communities, who would then after being subject to further alienation would take to violence to make their voices heard, which then present the state with that opportunity to brand them as terrorists. Thus, finally delegitimising them, their demands, their voices, their pain, their lives, and simultaneously gaining greater support for the arbitrary use of force against those communities.

ACTIVITY 6

In the light of the above discussion, let's divide the class into three groups. Each group will attempt to trace the historical origin of what is now labelled as terrorist activities in the three places mentioned above—Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Kashmir.

• ACTIVITY 7

In the recent past, the ex JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar has become a strong voice for the politics of meaningful change, with his political alignment with the Left (specifically CPI). His emphasis continues to be on struggle for bringing an end to the multifaceted inequality within democratic India in the name of religion, caste, class, race, gender, hence striving towards bringing freedom in the real sense of the word, with the aspiration of a country, where everyone is free to pursue their choices and be themselves, without any socio political, economic obstructions or external pressures standing in their way.

The first clip of his speech at the University. The second one is a counter to him and the ideals he stands for. The second one has usually branded him as an anti national. With this as the context, let's now see the following clippings. We will then discuss what you draw from his speech about his ideas and the politics that he espouses.

Kanhaiya Kumar speech at JNU: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yS9AX8rvYhg>

ABVP against Kanhaiya Kumar and branding him as anti national:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYiKi2SkRGg>

Nation, Nationalism and Patriotism

Nation, Nationalism and Patriotism. It is very important to draw the distinction between these three highly debated concepts, particularly in the present day and in light of our current conversation. This is primarily because it is these words that are thrown around when trying to legitimize or delegitimize certain actions, more importantly certain people and what they stand for. But before going into that discussion, we should make a quick stop and unpack what these concepts and ideas stand for and what they imply.

Nation: In popular perception, the nation refers to a territorial boundary within which Drawing from Benedict Anderson, a nation is best defined as an imagined political community. It is imagined as both inherently sovereign and limited. What does imagined imply in this case? It is imagined because members of even the smallest of the nations will not know most of their fellow members, yet there is a deep sense of their communion in their minds. It is imagined as a community because, despite the deep inequalities and exploitation undercutting a nation, the nation is always imagined as a deep horizontal comradeship.

Nationalism: Nationalism can be defined as an ideology that is driven towards promoting the interests of the nation with the belief that it is the interests of the nation rooted in the belief that national interests supersedes the interests of all other groups or communities. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines Nationalism as the ideology based on the premise that the individual's loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpass other individual or group interests.

Patriotism: Patriotism can be defined as the love, devotion and the feeling of pride towards one's country. It is popularly believed that patriotism is less normative, more flexible, and thus also less coercive.

What emerges from these definitions is that these are all fluid concepts and cannot be fixed in time and space since it is heavily based on the context in which it finds itself. While nationalism could find some very positive impact, as in the ideology geared towards bringing the end of colonialism and bringing independence to colonies, it could equally and maybe even more so bring

out the images of the radical form that nationalism could take leading to a sense of racial or ethnic superiority giving rise to a case such as that of Hitler's Germany. Historically, there have been instances where nationalism has been seen to assume forms that have been very detrimental for a society primarily because it is an ideology that could potentially give the space to coercively curb voices that chose to speak a different language, a language that questions the power holders in the state, their actions, policies, and motives. It is an ideology that gives birth to a certain sense of hegemony, be it racial, ethnic, religious or otherwise, and enables a space where power goes unchecked.

This is precisely where the role of dissent comes in. Does this mean that those who speak up to power are against the nation then? It is quite the contradictory in fact. Dissent performs the most critical function in sustaining a democracy- to check and curtail the rise of power and the functioning of the power holder, and the significance of dissent is particularly pronounced under a weak opposition to the ruling party in the government, because then it falls entirely on the populous to rise in dissent. Without dissent, a democracy could quickly and subtly transition into becoming an autocracy, and history has shown us what dictatorship could look like. Thus, blind love, devotion or pride towards one's nation is not helpful, it is rather detrimental to the fate of that nation in fact. Instead, a critical analysis and questioning of where the nation is placed, the issues plaguing the society including caste, gender, religion, the dilemmas it faces internally and externally, and most importantly consciously scrutinizing and critiquing the political climate within the nation is what would ensure the sustainability and progress of the nation and its people alike. The ruling party should engage with dissent to ensure that the nation is moving in the right direction where the welfare of the people is key. Yet today, the state machinery is making every effort to absolutely crush dissent and not just dissent, but the effort to delegitimize and wipe out dissenters through violence or by labelling them as anti national is a massive step forward for the complete breakdown and decline of any democracy.

ACTIVITY 8

Let's read, listen, see these pieces form the political landscape of our times. How do you react to them? Do you think these work towards strengthening a nation by addressing and questioning the internal issues plaguing society and its people or do they point towards a sense of dislike and hatred for the country working in pursuit of bringing the downfall of the nation?

This is a piece by the great poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz that was written in protest of military dictatorship in Pakistan and has recently been described as anti Hindu:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIWbO-6l7r4&t=1s>

This is the letter that was written by 50 eminent personalities from the arts and academia against the multiple cases of lynching that had surfaced in recent times, following which all of these 50 personalities were charged with sedition:

https://www.scribd.com/document/419587342/Letter-by-eminent-personalities#from_embed

ACTIVITY 9

This is a classic piece of protest poetry penned by Habib Jalib
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJ7PsjDZVlk>

Firstly, how do you react to this? Secondly, where and how do you see the relevance of this with the socio political turmoil and oppression that we are faced with today? Now, connect what you draw from the central theme of this poetry, with a narrative of any one pressing issue of inequality and suppression currently ongoing in any part of the world.





ACTIVITY 10.....

Encourage students to read the articles on

<https://www.firstpost.com/india/anti-caa-protest-at-shaheen-bagh-powered-by-women-has-become-symbol-of-resistance-and-spawned-replicas-across-country-7933071.html>

<https://www.deccanherald.com/national/north-and-central/jnu-students-start-protest-march-stopped-by-police-777253.html>

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/world/south-asia/2019/08/08/over-500-detained-as-indian-kashmir-seethes-under-lockdown> circulate these images

DISCUSS: Is protesting against the actions of the ruling government the same as protesting against the country?

ACTIVITY 11

Legality versus Morality?

Questioning the state and its arbitrary oppressive use of power is the crucial element of morality, despite the legal and coercive force that a state might use to delegitimize your questions, ideas and your existence. Speaking up to power is most critical, even while that power holder might try to stifle your speech and agency in the garb of legality.

Then, is what is moral not always legal?

Explore this question, drawing from these images and using that to analyse any one situation of socio political conflict. In this context, whose actions are valorised and whose is delegitimized?

