'Radicalisation': Getting Down to What is Under the Surface

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Introduction

Radicalisation is an essentially contested concept, requiring hands-on experience to untangle the complexities and decipher the underlying causes that drives this phenomenon. Realities conveyed, in cognizance to this phenomenon, can appear to be authentic, yet remain deceptive in many aspects. Therefore, to understand the concept, contextualising radicalisation is pertinent. As argued by Pamela Ballenger, the personalities attributed to any culture reflects in the values or principles imbibed by the populations in the particular context.[1] In conflict societies, cultural evolution is impacted by outside factors like radicalisation. However, the way radicalisation manifests in different societies is filtered through society's capability to handle the turbulence created through the percolation of radicalised elements— some societies absorb the shock without suffering much damage,

Key Points

- It is very important for a state, who wishes to combat terrorism, to understand the context of armed hostilities and accordingly counter the radicalisation of the society.
- States should foster ideational ecosystems wherein different ideas— whether radical or moderate, are contested and debated. Discourses are therefore self-regulatory wherein ideas which are not suitable will be discarded.
- Terrorism and violence must be recognised as an 'outcome of a complex mix of variables' rather than a 'result of a blind devotion in ideology'.
- Lack of analysis of 'non-religious factors' in the 'creation of religious militarised extremists' is the most important aspect of religious terrorism.

while in other societies, where deep distrust prevails, radicalisation can exacerbate social tension, thus leading to social discords. Nonetheless, such contextualisation is ignored often by policymakers and extremists' organisations, when they resort to mechanisms of resolution. Therefore, context is quintessential as it complicates the social equation adding granularity to the discourse and forcing people, involved in counter radicalisation, to move beyond generalisations.

Likewise, the importance of 'context' can also be found in Adda Bozeman's work wherein she argues that 'cultures are transferable, but the intersection between cultures may not lead to accommodation of ideas'.[2] In fact, some ideas may not even exist in counterpart culture. Similarly, in conflict societies wherein intersection with the state authorities is more acute, differences occur as the state is unable to cope up with the variety of cultures that exists within a nation state. It is unable to understand particular conceptions of negotiation and resolution that the native population desires. Hence, it is foremost for the states, who wish to combat terrorism, to understand the context of armed hostilities and accordingly counter the radicalisation of the society.

The word 'radical' is derived from the Latin *radix-radic*, meaning 'root'.[3] The early meanings of 'radical' was based on the concept of 'root'— it was all about literal 'roots', with the meaning of, 'connected to, or originating from a root'.[4] The Oxford Dictionary defines 'radical' as, "to affect the foundation, going to the root" and "to seek the removal of all diseased tissue".[5] In Cambridge Dictionary it implies, "believing or expressing the belief that great or extreme social or political change is required".[6]

It is evident, thus, from above notions, that being a 'radical' or 'radicalised' is neither problematic nor unlawful. The origin of the term is dispassionate, but in contemporary times the word is subjected to intense scrutiny and often results in conceptually flawed understanding and applications. Thus, a little clarity in conceptual understanding is indispensable.

Who, exactly, is a radical? Literally, as elaborated above in different dictionary definitions, in today's world, it could be interpreted that almost all individuals, at some point of time, have had thoughts that did not match with the existing discourse. Everyone has felt a sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo at some point and had a desire to change things. As pointed out by Maya Mirchandani, radicalism refers to 'political doctrines' and 'ideological mindsets that represent hostility against the status quo, and advocates a sweeping change, however, it need not always be violent.[7] Even societies embraced the prevalence of radical ideas, as part of multiculturalism.

There are few revolutionary progressions that have taken place through radical ideas rather than incremental evolution. However, there is a need to proceed with caution while using the word 'radical' or 'radicalisation' from a security perspective. A radical is not someone who possesses radical ideas, rather, it refers to individuals who, through mental conditioning decides to undertake violent action. This is, thus, concerning democracies in general, and Indian democracy in particular. However, justifying violent means to achieve one's end is unlawful and is criminalised in democratic societies. Moreover, the Constitution of India provides mechanisms like 'Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression' which gives everyone the right to express their opinions. Thus, anyone can dispense radical ideas in public forums or societal discourse, if dissemination of such ideas incites violence or communal hatred, then such ideas are considered to be unconstitutional. Therefore, it is important to be clear about what it means to be a radical, and how radicalisation is understood in the security discourse. Thus, having radical ideas is, theoretically, 'unproblematic' but the consequences that follow such ideas are a concern for states or security apparatus.

Historically, radical movements in India can be traced back to the Telangana Agitation which started in 1940s[8] and the Left Wing radical movements.[9] Apparently, both protests turned violent, as the demands expressed by them were disparaged by the state. Correspondingly, protestors resorted to violent actions as an instrument to achieve their political and social objectives.

Apart from this, there are other expressions of radicalisation that can be observed in different parts of India, specifically in Kashmir. Popular discourse treats Kashmiri youth as 'getting radicalised' and subsequently alienates them. Hence, as alluded above, having a radical idea in itself does not mean deviancy; rather possessing radical ideas facilitates conceptualisation of different social realities – like a peaceful environment to live – that ultimately strengthens plurality within the state and society. Unless these radical ideas become a medium to drive violence in society or result in consequences that are not peaceful in nature, the state should foster ideational ecosystems where different ideas – whether radical or moderate – are contested and debated. Discourses are therefore self-regulatory wherein ideas which are not suitable, will be discarded. Hence, the State's approach as a 'gatekeeper' in societal discourse may not always work. The discourse itself should settle the debate on ideas and their varied manifestations.

Conflict ridden societies are expressive when it comes to highlighting their grievances. Their ability to demonstrate tribulations, in praxis, reflects their discontentment with the state. Correspondingly, these concerns are floated and shaped into a narrative, which in turn, shapes the people's attitude towards the establishment. In such a scenario, running a counter-narrative to neutralise the existing issues, will only act as a catalyst which will further accelerate the people's disillusionment towards the state. Interestingly, the word "grievance" itself means 'a real or imaginary cause of complaint'.[10] Therefore, grievances could be either true or malafide and there have been cases of both the categories but the communication of such grievances, which is pivotal, remains largely in silos and insulated.

A strong state and the rule of law can ensure effective management of a conflict ridden area. Since grievances are usually redressed by the state, the rule of law seeks to maintain a fine balance, wherein excesses of states are countered by giving rights to people. If a state's action results in losses for the citizenry, then the state is under obligation to effectively compensate the people. If grievances of people remain unaddressed, then there is a high possibility that the citizenry may resort to either peaceful means or violent means of protest

to demonstrate a thorough commitment to their cause, which may even turn into a consistent armed struggle against the state.

For instance, take the case of Mirza Nisar Hussain from Srinagar's Shamaswari locality, who was accused in the 1996 Lajpat Nagar blast and the Rajasthan bomb attack cases. In July 2019, after serving 23 years in jail, Nisar was acquitted of both the charges as he was wrongly found guilty, and the court reversed its decision to free Nisar. [11] Such cases leaves a deep impact on the individual's psychological condition, making the individual vulnerable to fall prey to extreme manifestation of radicalisation resulting in tendencies to undertake deep violence against the state.

Closely related but distinct is the issue of people joining the militancy. There is a dearth of literature that establishes a clear link on the 'motivation' of individuals to join extremist organisations, even when they are aware of the consequences of such actions. Also, there is a certain degree of reluctance within agencies to incorporate the outcomes of such studies and surveys into policy choices against conflict ridden societies. The problem will not be easily solved unless there is proper field study or academic debates on the same. Different theoretical models must be conceptualised to deeply study the different dimensions of conflict with an aim to propose solutions. Generalised models of negotiation, bargaining and resolution, may not be suitable for all contexts. Anthropological analysis to understand the society better, along with peace and conflict studies, restricted to a particular region can be a way forward.

Contemporary Discourse on Radicalisation

Radicalisation is a process through which radical ideas are forced against the status quo elements— usually through means of violence or destruction rather than dialectics. In short, violence is used as an 'instrument' to implement radical ideas which stands against the order of the current legal regimes. In contemporary discussions, however, the word is mostly used to define the 'process of resorting to violence specifically in the context of Islam'. Narrative at the Global level on the increasing levels of violence and destruction committed

by Al-Qaeda in the early 1990s—and subsequently by ISIS since 9/11—have denied the term— its unbiased, analytical value, and instead, it became a potent political tag that is mostly applied to one religious community around the world, and "converting it to a sense of difference that could lead to, or legitimise, acts of violence".[12]

Professor Apporvanand points out in his article titled "The Truth about Radicalisation in India" that, 'organisations operating in the name of one particular religion (which necessarily does not represent all the people of that religion) are deemed radical'.[13] Indeed, the discourse has constructed an implicit understanding that treats only 'extreme manifestations of Islam' as radical, but completely ignores the hate propagated by other religions. For instance, the rise of Right Wing fringe mobs has resulted in an increase in acts of violence against people of different religious beliefs, including lynchings and mob attacks. Acts like these are normalised to the extent that, they are not regarded as manifestations of radicalism.

The indiscriminate use of terms like 'Islamic terrorism' underpins a 'misplaced believe' that terrorists who happen to be Muslims exist because Islam 'approves' terrorism and drives them inexorably towards it. The same proposition is also applied in the case of Kashmir. The issue of Kashmiris revolves around identities and aspirations, and the issue acquires a particular type of dimension because there is already a political backdrop to it, and there are agencies and groups attempting to take advantage of the same. Mosques or Madrasas may be bringing people together and mobilising them for violent action; these institutions may serve as effective mobilisation channels, but they may not be the fundamental reasons for such mobilisation, which are often rooted in individual experiences. However, the emphasis on religious institutions of a particular community is deeply problematic. The focus on 'tool' which is used to mobilise masses, in this case Islamic identity, can somehow subdue the underlying causes and reinforce the anger and frustration within people.

In 2018, two British Researchers—Gregory Waters and Robert Postings, released a report titled "Spiders of the Caliphate", [14] wherein they mapped online ISIS activity in the world through social media and similar networking sites. According to their research, intense cluster points of ISIS activity were present in the Middle East and Afghanistan-Pakistan region and then there is a huge gap before they resumes to the east of India-Bangladesh and onwards. The researchers termed India as "a circuit breaker" i.e. when it comes to mapping online radicalisation by ISIS, there is this vast geographic area (India) where cluster points were 'seemingly invisible'. This also coincides with the Indian Government's statistics about the number of people who have been either suspected of or arrested on charges of being associated with ISIS.[15] It is pertinent to have an unbiased view towards the religious identity of a person before labelling them as radicals. Radicals can be of any state, nation, religion irrespective of any identity. Radicals, therefore, can possess different identities, and so there is a need to de-emphasise the proposition that "radicals are only influenced by Islamic traditions". Since discourse is biased, the same tendencies are materialised in policy instruments. For instance, domestic law enforcement and intelligence agencies have concentrated their efforts on risks posed by people who follow an extremist view of Islam, while paying less attention to threats posed by the extreme far-right and far-left believers.

Focusing solely on a particular community, creates the impression that the entire community is being falsely accused. In such cases, efforts aimed at combating violent extremism may have the opposite effect, increasing alienation rather than reducing it.[16] It is therefore important that the State's approach should be to encourage broad-based policing and violence prevention measures that aren't associated with a particular ideological milieu. For instance, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act {UAPA} has been criticised for being a law which is 'selectively' used against minorities and human rights activists in order to stifle dissent.

According to data submitted in the Rajya Sabha by the Union Home Ministry, the total number of people arrested and convicted under the UAPA in between 2016 and 2019 was

5,922 and 132, respectively.[17] However, only 2.2 percent of cases filed under the UAPA, between 2016 and 2019, resulted in convictions.[18]

Going Beyond the Superficial Symptoms

Hannah Arendt, German-American philosopher, introduced the world to a new phrase in 1963 to try and decipher mass violence against specific groups, in her case, the Nazis of Germany against the Jews.[19] Arendt propounded the term "banality of evil", which specifies that dreadful acts of violence are committed not necessarily by psychopaths or sadists, but also by ordinary, normal, seemingly sane human beings acting on what they perceive to be expected of them by those in power.[20] Even in circumstances of heinous brutality, opinions differ: one side argues that such acts are the exception rather than the rule, while the other argues that even one act of violence is too much.

Counter terrorism strategists have often laid emphasis on what they call 'de-radicalisation'. However, de-radicalisation as a solution fails to recognise that if someone is willing to die a horrible death, even at the expense of one's life, then more powerful forces are driving such behaviour, than just the influence of a few days or weeks.

As Lt Gen Asad Durrani, former chief of the ISI, describes very astutely in his article "CT Made Easy": "Nothing comes close to a non-remedy to fight the menace of terrorism than our latest gimmick—the terrorists have been brainwashed, so let's read to them another narrative".[21] Anyone who believes that those committed to a cause, deep enough to blow themselves up could be 'reprogrammed' by a *mantra*, obviously has no idea as to what 'de-radicalisation' entails.[22] It demands sustained efforts for years if not decades without a miss, to bring an individual back from the violent ideology that an individual adheres to.

Moreover, former CIA officer– Michael Scheuer, now a professor at Georgetown University's Centre for Peace and Security Studies and author of *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror*, points out that, our leaders had propagated the narrative —"they

hate us for how we live and think". In reality, extremist attacks on the United States are driven by the belief that US foreign policy poses a threat to their religion— "They hate us for what we do, not who we are", as also evinced by Akeel Bilgrami, but with slight digression that is by emphasising the colonial history which explains the reluctance in supporting the liberal minded Americans.[23] Amongst other reasons, Scheuer holds the US foreign policy actions of the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan; their unstinted support of Israel against the Palestinians, etc. as reasons for fuelling acts of terrorism by some Muslims.

At an individual level, some people might also suffer from a 'persecution complex' for real or perceived wrongs committed on them or their community at large. This, as pointed out by Akeel Bilgrami, might be one of the reasons for moderate Muslims to not stand up against the radical elements in their society. However, the point of contention remains in western domination and colonial history, which creates a fear of being subjugated or suppressed by the masters of the West. Frederick Forsyth's *The Afghan* speaks about the account of Izmat Khan who swears revenge against the US and joins the Taliban after a missile hits a slope in the Tora Bora, resulting in a landslide that buries his village and his entire family.[24]

Likewise is the case of Zubair Bashir Turrey from Kashmir's Shopian district. Documented by Dr. David Devadas in his book *The Generation of Rage in Kashmir*, it talks how Turrey joined militant ranks after facing relentless humiliation and harassment at the hands of police, what he later called a 'painful journey'.[25]These are deep psychological wounds that leave an indelible mark on a teenager thereby exposing him/her to things that are far beyond his/her age. But this in no way means that the actions carried by individuals in forms of extreme violence are justified. Perhaps conversely, even if individuals suffer because of ill will of the state, citizens are given rights to follow legal proceedings against the state. Given the prevalence of the rule of law, effective compensation can be demanded from the state. In a nutshell, a sustainable ecosystem for the prevalence of peace can only be ensured if a fine balance exists between the state and the society.

State's heavy-handedness needs to be checked and balanced by constitutional provisions that empower civil society and individuals. Likewise, legal mechanisms are opted to contest the state's encroachments so as to refine the balance and let democracy mature.

Discourse in South Asia

In South Asia, the entire debate is about the ultimate 'tip of the spectrum' where the manifestation of violence is observable. What about the phenomenon that fuels such violence? The 'idea' is more important than the 'tool'. If one is intrinsically susceptible to or receptive to a certain 'idea', it is because of a complex interplay of personal, social, and historical reasons. It would be naive to believe that a pep talk would be enough to instigate a person to resort to violence. The other way is also true; it would be naive to believe that a pep talk would be enough to get rid of the 'idea'. In other words, 'ideas' get embedded in human psychology and remain stuck, but claiming to counter ideas by floating counter narratives, would not lead to any significant changes in behaviour.

Empirical research suggests that 'violent extremism' generally originates from grievances associated with social marginalisation, political exclusion, lack of access to justice or resources, and repression or abuse by the state.[26] Violent extremist groups often seek to trigger an overreaction by state with the aim that repressive responses will add to the justification for their violence and boost recruitment.[27] In such scenarios, there is a need for the state to respond to attacks and persistent threats posed by violent extremists, with a proportionate and measured law enforcement and security response— heavy-handed tactics, extra-legal and "special" measures, particularly those that violates civil rights and liberties— may temporarily comfort a frightened population, but ultimately help to fuel the grievances that motivate violence and advance extremist agendas.[28] A long term sustainable solution will be possible only by strengthening the rule of law, human rights, and inclusive political processes, as well as building local communities' capacity to identify and implement non-violent and practical solutions to such problems. Multiple factors frequently collaborate in the same scenario, and their importance may shift over

time. Individual level radicalisation can be fuelled in a number of ways—some may be old grievances, while others may be more recent events. Understanding the local context is essential, and rarely will there be a single factor responsible for radicalisation.[29] The main reason that is leading to youth's vulnerability and increasing their desire to join extremist ranks, often violent groups in Kashmir, are profound feelings of injustice and anger about their social and political exclusion by the state. [30]

One factor that South Asia is rife with is that across the region there is a rising intolerance for diversity of opinions— it may be more religious in some parts, ethnic or political in others, but, it is being witnessed that the society is becoming increasingly polarised and intolerant. Communities across the region are increasingly pressing for their identity being 'only true'. There are groups or actors who take advantage of the 'intolerance factor' and are able to identify the fault lines that make states susceptible to violence.

On the other hand, States try hard to define everything within the scope of sovereignty. Governments try to focus more on the economic and infrastructural development of the conflict ridden regions. However, it does not succeed much because the problem is "political alienation". Almost never are the actual fault lines economic in nature, rather they are socio-political in character. Another factor which plays an important role in regions of conflict is "state's heavy- headedness". People in state's security custody, who are tortured and treated illegally, are more likely to become violent against the state once they are released.[31]The bottom-line hence is that, 'use of force against violence may give a sense of peace but does not bring sustainable peace for security establishments'.

The Peacebuilders Approach

Peacebuilders tend to discuss the deep underlying reasons rather than superficial symptoms. Discussing the link between violence, lack of rule of law, and poor governance is significant. Johan Galtung, principal founder of the discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies, formulated the concept of 'positive and negative peace'[32]—the latter comprises absence of violence. For instance, the state managed to bring a region under turmoil to peace by using

deterrent means(negative peace).[33] Positive peace, on the other hand, is more than just the absence of violence. Sri Lanka is a perfect example. Sri Lanka is a remarkable example of a country that has done a great job of moving from a major civil war to negative peace, but the process of transition from negative peace to sustainable (positive) peace is challenging, which Sri Lanka is presently experiencing.[34]

The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed changes in terms of number of militancy related incidents and recruitment. The situation could never arrive at a point wherein it could be termed as 'negative peace' — violence never really paused. In the past, however, Kashmir has presented the central government with numerous opportunities to initiate peace and development, but all the opportunities were lost due to a variety of reasons—most important being lack of political decisiveness and long term approach required to ensure that Kashmir does not simply remain a conflict business.

Another example could be the militancy prevalent in the State of Punjab. Punjab experienced unprecedented levels of violence between late 1970s and early 1990s. The people of Punjab ended a decade of terrorism that disrupted the rhythm of their lives. They did it by surrendering the miscreants, who once resided among them, when their depredations became unbearable.[35] Although, the State of Punjab remains susceptible to recurrence of violence, however, it has been able to attain negative peace but transition to a state of positive peace is yet to be achieved.

Recommendations

If religion has become a tool for radicalisation, it is almost always because of political failure. There are two ways by which leaders or those who are in power can contribute to reducing radicalisation. *First* is 'inclusivity'. Individual identities, whether religious, racial, political, or other, must be respected. The Government's approach has to be 'all inclusive' and as the legal maxim goes "Justice must not only be done, but must also be seen to be done". Just saying that the Government is inclusive would not work, its actions on the ground should reflect that they are one. The *second* is 'hope'. The one possible approach towards

radicalism should be to go with 'a warm heart and cool mind'. Also, if we are to move away from radicalisation towards a new and positive future, then it is the youth who are the way forward and therefore they have to be at the centre of attention. As we battle with the reality of violent extremism, the one thing that we must learn is the importance of truly attempting to understand as to why people participate in such violent acts. The most effective approach of preventing individuals from taking this path is, not by dismissing their beliefs as abhorrent; rather, recognising the complicated underlying motivations that underpin their actions. Integrating military and law enforcement support with a willingness to reform is an important step.

Conclusion

Lack of analysis of 'non-religious factors' in the 'creation of religious militarised extremists' is the most important aspect of religious terrorism. When religion is identified as the primary cause of terrorism, then it becomes much easier to ignore, if not justify, the sacrificing of civil liberties and human rights in the name of national security. China, for example, is attempting to hide its Han ethno chauvinism while justifying the persecution of Turkic-speaking Uyghur Muslims as prospective terrorists.[36] Blaming religion is useful as it diverts attention away from difficult questions about how governments create conditions that encourage people to engage in violent extremism. It is interesting to note that many people falsely assume that attempting to understand the core causes of violent extremism translates to justification. Inga Clendinnen, a Holocaust historian, coined the phrase "*moral sensitivity exclusion*", implying that understanding as to why someone commits something "bad" is the first step towards rationalising their conduct. However, in order to prevent people from crossing the 'line of no return', the causes that build up to this must be acknowledged and understood. Terrorism and violence must be recognised as the 'outcome of a complex mix of variables' rather than a 'result of a blind devotion in ideology'.

End Notes

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