Trends in Youth Radicalization in South Asia

A Publication based on the proceedings of the Regional Conference convened by the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) as the South Asian Regional Secretariat for the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC).
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Preface

Gamini Keerawella
Akshay Senanayake

If we are serious about prevention, and particularly about preventing conflict, we need to be serious about engaging with and investing in young women and men. We need their energy to tackle the most serious challenges facing us. We need their involvement and commitment, if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, take effective action on climate change, and create a safer and more peaceful world.

- UN Secretary-General, António Guterres’ remarks at "Investing in Youth to Counter Terrorism", 12 April 2018

Out of the 24 percent of the world’s population who make South Asia their home, approximately 30 percent constitute youth (ages 10–24). This burgeoning youth population which social scientists label the ‘youth bulge’ is a conspicuous feature in the social and political landscape of South Asia. The ‘youth bulge’ is a demographic dividend, capable of stimulating economic growth and building a resilient political culture that drives the region to sustainable development. This is especially true in view of the fact that youth make up South Asia’s largest working population. At the same time, this demographic has a strong propensity to translate into an opportunity cost if the youth resort to violence in order to achieve their due place in the social, political and economic structures and processes.

The post-colonial history of South Asia is replete with insurgencies where youth play an active role. In the region, where
socio-political mobilization is rapid, new generations of youth constantly come forward and demand a place in the political sun. When political and social structures are adamantly rigid and exclusive, they naturally look for alternatives. When youth feel that their progress is blocked in every avenue due to factors like class, caste, ethnicity, religion and gender, they become a useful tool in the hands of ethno-political entrepreneurs. As a result, youth radicalism, in a number of occasions, has become the breeding ground for violent extremism.

Dedication and idealism are the two main symbiotic features of youth political behavior. If channeled constructively, the youth political dynamism can be the motor for socio-political progress in South Asia. At the same time, it can also be mobilized destructively by parochial loyalties to destabilize the entire polity in South Asia. This is why youth political behavior is considered a barometer for the political climate. South Asia has been marked by a rapid pace of youth political mobilization, manifested by numerous armed uprisings and insurgencies. Youth radicalism was traditionally associated with the revolutionary jargon of Leftist politics. However, in the contemporary socio-political context, youth radicalism has entered a new politico-historical phase. The change in youth political behavior can be attributed to three main factors. First, the new generation of youth is no longer attracted to the traditional Left, partly due to the global crisis of the Left in the late 20th century. Second, the impact of globalization and the information revolution has brought forward a new youth culture through new youth icons and ideals in the digital age. Third, the rise of ethnic and faith based political mobilization movements has replaced the traditional Left as the main force against the established order.

At the same time, the promising tendencies of youth radicalism should not be underestimated. They are more sensitive to the broader social and political issues to which the older generation often give low priority. The new vision and commitment of the youth are vital for the social, economic and political progress of the region.
Therefore, directing youth radicalism to the benefit of society has been one of the main challenges facing South Asia. Radicalism is not inherently a negative process. Though negative radicalism, which leads to violence (as in violent extremism and terrorism), has been the most popular understanding of radicalism, new social movements are emerging in the region - particularly in gender politics, human rights discourse and environmental politics – which are challenging the traditionally held notions of radicalization. This defines the ability of the emerging youth bulge to use ‘radicalism’ to create social progress, using ‘Innovative action’ rather than using violence or extremism. In this context, tracing the trends in youth radicalization in South Asia from the past to the future is important to understand the political development of the youth.

No one is born a radicalized youth. They are created by circumstances and fueled by various drivers in motion. The process of transformation from radicalism to violent extremism needs to be traced and unpacked carefully. Youth unrest is a manifestation of malice in society. Hence, it is necessary to identify the root causes of youth radicalism. Widening access to the decision-making process and embarking on social economic reforms should be the key element in addressing youth radicalism.

It was against this backdrop, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) in partnership with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) organized an International Conference on ‘Trends in Youth Radicalization in South Asia’, in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 07 June 2018. GPPAC is a worldwide member-led network of civil society organizations active in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It consists of fifteen regional networks of local organizations and RCSS is the South Asian Regional Secretariat.

The conference was convened as a part of the 2018 GPPAC week held in Colombo. The proposal of RCSS to have the Annual GPPAC International Steering Group (ISG) meeting in Colombo was approved by its membership. GPPAC South Asian Regional Steering Group (RSG) meeting was followed the ISG and GPPAC
Gender Focal Point Group meeting. The conference on ‘Trends in Youth Radicalization in South Asia’ was convened as part of these weeklong activity programs.

The purpose of the Conference was to identify the diverse trends and processes of youth radicalization in South Asia in order to propose strategies on how to promote positive youth radicalism towards socio-political progress. The presenters at the Conference were requested to organize their discourse in line with the following questions:

1. What are the diverse trends in youth radicalization in South Asia?
2. What are the various drivers that contribute to radicalize youths in South Asia?
3. When does youth radicalism become violent extremism? What conditions and processes contribute to the transformation?
4. How to promote positive youth radicalism towards socio-political progress in South Asia?

The Conference provided a platform for experts and scholars from South Asia to present papers and deliberate on the theme based on the experiences of their respective countries and the region. Youth radicalization is a highly contested term. Positions, terms and definitions adopted by authors are their own and they do not necessarily represent the view point of RCSS. This volume consists of papers presented at the conference.

RCSSS invited Dr. Deepika Udagama, Chairperson, Human Rights’ Commission of Sri Lanka to deliver the keynote address. Her contribution to the field of legal education in general and human rights education in particular is well known. We invited Dr. Udagama not only because of the relevance of the evolving discourse on Human Rights to the theme of the conference but also to recognize her dedication and commitment in ensuring the protection of human rights conditions in Sri Lanka. The keynote speech is included as the opening chapter of this volume.
Dr. Nishchal N. Pandey in his chapter, “Countering Youth Radicalization in South Asia” takes a broader perspective, capturing the entire South Asian region. The lack of job opportunities for youth drive them toward extremist activities. He argued that societal discrimination is also a factor that draws youth to extremist groups. The paper’s main stance revolves around the argument that in the case of South Asia youth radicalization has a close link with violent extremism borne out of mal-governance and discrimination. He points out that less focus is given by the governments of South Asia to tap the enormous positivity and enthusiasm among the youth. The paper then sheds light on the various factors that push youth toward violent extremism. The need for civil society to play a greater role is also asserted.

The chapter contributed by Dr. Shafeek Seddiq covers youth radicalization in Afghanistan. The paper begins by reviewing the experiences of extremism in Afghanistan’s recent past. He gives a detailed account of extremist activity in South Asia during 2017, including Afghanistan in 2018, highlighting their social and economic costs. He then explores the drivers of youth radicalization in Afghanistan, reflecting on how an absence of reliable data has made it difficult to measure changing trends in radicalization. He identifies positive youth radicalization, with examples of activity from university students, as well as religious aspect of radicalization, especially in rural areas. The process of transition from radicalism to extremist violence is also described in detail.

The chapter contributed by Samal Hemachandra covers youth radicalization in Sri Lanka, with especial attention to the ethno-religious tensions between Sinhala Buddhists and Muslims since the end of the armed conflict in 2009. As a point of departure, the meaning of the words radical and radicalism is discussed, giving various definitions and interpretations. The author differentiates between radicalism and violent extremism. The paper then divulges into a historical analysis of youth radicalism in post-independent Sri Lanka, discussing both the positive and negative trends in radicalism. Thence, it discusses the current trends in youth radicalization in Sri
Lanka. The author argues that youth radicalization can be addressed positively ensuring a positive impact on society.

Dr. Malini Balamayuran, in her chapter, concentrates on the root causes of youth radicalization in Sri Lanka, giving a historical overview of youth radicalization in the country. The paper begins with the exploration of definitions of the phrase ‘radicalization’ and their connotations. In tracing the radicalization process of the Tamil youth, the author highlights the role of Tamil political leaders who had intense interaction with youth at the early stages. This paper unpacks the process that eventually drove the Tamil youth to violent extremism and the formation of the LTTE. The activities of the LTTE during the war, particularly the role they played in the areas controlled by them are discussed. Finally, the author draws attention to the post-war grievances of ex-LTTE cadres and their struggle in reintegrating into the society.

Vidura Munasinghe begins his chapter by discussing the evolution of the term ‘radical’ and the distinctions between the radical left and right in contemporary societies. He then goes into detail about the characteristics of radicalization in the present day, exploring the extremist groups/movements that emerged during the last two decades in Sri Lanka. The rise of extremist Sinhala-Buddhist groups after the end of the war is reflected on in the paper. The reaction to Sinhala-Buddhist extremism is also examined. In conclusion, the author dwells on the challenges in countering negative radicalization in Sri Lanka.

Prof. Moonis Ahmar in his chapter discusses the current youth bulge in Pakistan and how the State has found it difficult to cope with it. The paper argues that the growth of the youth population is an opportunity for Pakistan. A force that can be utilized to transform the country into a more progressive and welfare-oriented nation. The author examines the predicament of youth in Pakistan and the surge of radicalization. After giving an overview of the current trends in youth radicalization in Pakistan, the author discusses the way out, stating that the best arrangement
to manage youth radicalism in Pakistan is to promote freedom, broadmindedness, tolerance and enlightenment through better education and opportunities for personality development and career guidance.

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Youth Radicalism: A Human Rights Perspective*

By Dr. Deepika Udagama
Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

To speak of youth is an attractive proposition. It is about energy, dynamism, new thinking, daring to hope against all obstacles and is a very creative period of one’s life. Perhaps it is the spring of life. To quote a madrigal by the Bard himself, “Youth is full of pleasant, age is full of care. Youth like summer morn, age like winter weather. Youth like summer brave, age like winter bear. Youth is hot and cold, age is weak and cold. Youth is wild and age is tame”. I’m not too sure about that last part, because age can also be wild. But nonetheless we have a certain idea about youth as being an extremely creative period of human life. But at the same time, youth is filled with difficulties and contradictions as they navigate the passage through life, moving from childhood to adulthood. For many people around the world, navigating this difficult period is not possible in a conducive environment. It is then this environment that we need to speak about. If the environment is supportive, democratic, recognizes agency and is inclusive, it would be an extremely wonderful period of one’s life. But radicalism arises due to the deprivation of that environment, which can be defined in terms of human rights.

* Text of the Key Note Address delivered at the International Conference on ‘Trends in Youth Radicalism in South Asia’ organized by Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) as a part of its GPPAC – RCSS Week on 7th June 2018 at Hotel Ramada, Colombo. RCSS is the Regional Secretariat for Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.
I am very glad that, in the introductory speech, Prof. Keerawella spoke of positive and negative youth radicalism, because generally we, as adults, tend to look at youth radicalism in a negative manner, as the product of troublemakers. But we do recognize that the world has always changed, human society has evolved because of troublemakers and because of people who have dared to think differently. I have always wanted to read the “Motorcycle Diaries” of Che Guevara, and a student of mine actually brought it to me and told me how inspired she was by it. It can be seen from such instances how positive energy, positive youth and positive youth radicalism can really ennoble and build so many positive things in the world. Youth radicalism must be looked at as an absolutely essential item of any dynamic society. Rather than discouraging youth radicalism, we must encourage youth radicalism. But the problem is that youth radicalism must never be steered in a particular manner, so that it becomes inhumane. Therein lies the difference. The type of radicalism that Che Guevara brought into the world was very humanistic, was based on a love of human kind and a wanted change because of that love of human kind. It wasn’t gratuitously destructive, wasn’t negative and wasn’t at all about revenge. We, as adults, must always look to youth radicalization as something positive and try to move it away, in a very conscious manner, from the negative radicalism that we see all around us. Angry young people are not a bad thing, but harnessing that urge to change in a supportive manner can serve society very well.

In analyzing negative youth radicalization from a human rights dimension, I can reflect on the beautiful words in the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is an absolute truism. It says “if man (of course those days, everything was drafted in a very gender-specific way) is not to have recourse to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, then human rights must be protected through the rule of law.” This is exactly what the youth are demanding. They’re saying they have an urge to change, that they want an environment that is humane and that respects their dignity and rights. From a South Asian perspective, the concept of ‘Dharma’ provides us with
ample thought for this. There is no distinction between Dharma and human rights. What is righteous, equal, just and equitable is Dharma, which can then be said to be indeed about human rights. A righteous society or a righteous state would provide this environment and would look at youth as a special asset to society, and would readily welcome the radical ideas that the youth have to offer. In looking at the whole panoply of rights that we are speaking of, everyone wants agency, especially at that age when we are moving away from childhood toward adulthood. Agency is, being able to speak for one self and being able to take decisions for one self. Therefore, the right of participation, the right to free expression and the right of association and assembly are absolutely essential.

There is then the dimension of economic and social rights. Today, when we speak of human rights, we don’t just speak of political and civil rights, but also of the all-important economic and social rights, as well as cultural rights, and the idea of indivisibility of these rights, that the entire range of all these rights is all equally important. At a young age, all these dimensions are very important; we need civil rights, political rights, cultural rights and we also definitely speak of economic and social rights such as education, health care, job opportunities and so on. Relating this rights dimension to the so called ‘youth problem’ is important.

First, I wish to point out that the terminology itself is a problem. Instead of calling it a ‘youth problem’, it should be called ‘the youth factor’, or ‘youth resurgence’, or ‘youth dynamism’, or in some such positive way. There aren’t many studies on youth in Sri Lanka, but the ones that are there are quite enlightening. I don’t think things in Sri Lanka are very different from situations in many other parts of the world. However, the definition of youth in Sri Lanka is different to the international definition, in terms of age, because the international definition is age between 15 and 24 years. In Sri Lanka, 15-29 years is the age range for youth. It appears that the idea of youth is very diverse in different societies for various socio-economic and political reasons.
Surveys done in 2002, by the University of Colombo, and another done by the Open University of Sri Lanka in 2014-- which paved the way for the adoption of the youth policy in Sri Lanka in 2014-- point to the fact that a majority of the youth interviewed were of the view that their main problem was lack of equity in society. Equitable opportunities and justice in society was lacking. It was all about educational and employment opportunities, and we should not be surprised about that, as this is the age when we start thinking about these opportunities. There was also the issue of inclusiveness in a diverse society articulated by the youth. They want their identity respected and recognized. And even if they have education and job opportunities, what is desired most is respect for their identity. This was seen in terms of youth radicalism in the North and East. Of the two cycles of violence in the South launched by youth, the first in 1971 was based on class oriented injustice, and the second one was more nationalistic in nature. But in looking at the youth uprising in the North and East, It was about securing opportunities via recognition of identity.

Another factor brought out in the surveys is the absolute disregard for and dismissal of the status quo of the political establishment. This is possibly common in all countries, because the political establishment in most of our countries is about patronage; it is not about systems. So the youth are raving and ranting against this. The 1971 youth insurrection was very much about that. It was about the establishment that was distributing opportunities via patronage. And a large number of educated youth were left behind in terms of employment opportunities and opportunities of joining politics.

Another major demand was the need to access good education. But no report enlightens us on what they thought was a ‘good education’ and what was meant by it. In taking a human rights perspective on this matter of the right to education, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Child Rights Convention, refer to education not as a process which leads
to job opportunities or training for an occupation. The Universal Declaration refers to the right to education as a process of building each individual’s personality—building of personality and self-discovery in a manner that makes it possible for one to appreciate one’s rights and other’s rights, and also recognize how to co-exist peacefully with others. That dimension of education, of course, has fled out of the window these days. This is something we, in the education field—in the higher education field and other levels—are extremely concerned about. The mercenary-mindedness of the education system of this country is very problematic.

One of the greatest factors that create disenchantment amongst the youth is an irrelevant education system. Education is meant to humanize. This was the whole idea of education. But today education in Sri Lanka is not about humanism, but about cut-throat competition and ‘success’, whatever that means. What is it that we are creating at the end of the day? Youngsters, who have aspirations for a better life that everyone is entitled to, but are amoral, - an outcome bought about by an absolutely amoral education where morality and ethics don’t seem to have a place. In examining education systems among the countries of the world, we find that some are doing better than others. But in Sri Lanka, with the onset of an open economy in the 1980s, the education system, with the support of World Bank funding, has turned in a totally different direction. It is purely about occupational opportunities, training for jobs and fitting these youngsters into those pegs that are provided in the job market and nothing else. The point about citizenship and civic consciousness are today considered ‘old-fashioned’ ideas. We are scoffed at when we talk about these ideas. But the youth want something different, something that is vibrant, enjoyable and relevant to their lives, and that is not provided. Parents and the entire system force them to go through this rat race instead. Recently, while talking to civil society leaders down South, one civil society leader stated that “if we do not take up this issue of education, we are doomed. All possibilities of reforming the country would be lost.” What we are creating at the end of this process, he said, are
“sub-humans who will only wave certificates at your face.” This is indeed correct and there is therefore, much to be concerned about.

When thinking of youth reform, we really have to think about a humane education system, that provides enjoyment, pleasure, opportunity, aesthetics and the possibility of being creative and which recognizes the agency of youth. All this creativity is suppressed by the current education system. This may be true for many countries, because it’s nothing but competition and preparing youngsters for a future that makes it possible for them to actively and ‘successfully’ engage this age of ‘glorious consumerism’. These youngsters have an extra burden on them because they have to deal with expectations of mega consumerism. For most parents, it’s been about guiding children through the education system, into the field of work as highly paid professionals. What is emphasized is not social duty as a professional, but is, on the most part, about social status and conspicuous consumption. We are all subjected to this. Hopefully, in the deliberations that will take place, you will look at ways of adopting policies that are very favourable towards the youth, in order to mobilize the energy and creativity of youth. The challenges faced by the youth today require absolute radical educational reforms.

In Sri Lanka we do have broad educational opportunities due to the existence of public education, but the tertiary education system is a problem, as there are only a few opportunities at this level. Overall, however, we cannot say that equity of opportunity of education is a major problematic factor in this country. While we work on equity of opportunity in education, if we forget the substance and the goals and objectives of education, we are doomed as a society and the youth are going to be very frustrated young people who are not going to be able to see any possibility of their youthful energy and positive radicalism harnessed. We need to send a message to the youth saying “we need your radicalism; we need your new thinking and this is something very positive for society and this is the way we wish to harness it.” All of this should be viewed through the prism of human rights and humanism. Not
‘welfarism’, which the youth today do not want. They are more focused about their entitlement to rights and recognition of their dignity.

I am inspired by all the work being done on youth. Our commission has not done enough on youth and we recognize that. So from this year onwards, we are planning on having an annual youth camp for human rights. It is not about teaching the technicalities and the legal dimensions of human rights, but about the value base of human rights, about civic consciousness and civics, and how to set about one’s life in a democratic manner respecting pluralism in society. That, we believe, is something very new to a lot of youngsters. With that and hope for the future, I end my address. Thank you.
Countering Youth Radicalization in South Asia

By Dr. Nishchal N. Pandey

Teeming millions come out of colleges every year in South Asia looking for jobs. The governments of the region have been unable to provide enough employment opportunities for them. As a result, some opt for jobs in the Gulf, Malaysia or elsewhere while some others join one or the other militant organizations or insurgent groups. The ‘angry and hungry’ of the region are an easy target for radical or sinister elements aspiring to recruit them into their organizations. There is also massive discrimination against Dalits, untouchables and the scheduled castes (who might be generally described as ‘depressed communities or groups’ leaving aside particular national nomenclatures), and tribes in the region. An overwhelming number of radicalized youth say that they joined these organizations because of discrimination they faced in their respective societies. And this in turn also has a close nexus with weak governance, corruption, political instability, policy incoherence of the governments, regional disparity, etc. It can be said that in the case of South Asia and indeed in other parts of the world, youth radicalization has a close association with violent extremism borne out of mal-governance and discrimination.

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This issue has increasingly become a concern for the international community as well. The UN on its part has been focusing on this theme for some time now. “Nearly half the world’s population – 46 per cent – is 24 years-old or younger,” UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said, and added, “Africa and the Middle East have the highest proportions of young people.” The radicalization of young people is a source of deep concern in rich and poor countries alike, as poisonous ideas flow across borders at the touch of a button, a post on a Facebook page or the tap of a tweet. Terrorist groups exploit social, economic and political injustices to entice young people through false propaganda that glorifies distorted ideologies, while unscrupulous recruiters are using social media to lure unsuspecting teenagers down dangerous roads”. Mr. Guterres further observed, “Violent extremist groups target and invest in young people because they are aware of their potential and their strong desire for change.”

The Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake also said: “...the fact is, the vast majority of youth are peaceful, and are not in danger of participating in violence.” Although this is a fact, not much focus is given by the governments of South Asia to tap the enormous positivity and enthusiasm among the youth.

“On the contrary,” she continued, “young people’s resilience is transforming local communities while combating extremist movements.” Thus the issue of youth radicalization and violent extremism will be in the headlines for some time and if the governments rely only on hard power at their disposal, it will be not enough to deal with the problem. There is an urgent need to bring in the civil society, track-II representatives and the youth themselves. A big role needs to be played by political parties who only exploit the muscle power of the youth during elections. Politicians should stop paying lip-service for youth employment and instead do something concrete. They also tend to enjoy foreign visits organized by the South Asian Diaspora to Europe, Canada, Australia, etc., which practice has seen an increasing trend. They
use the Diaspora to collect funds for elections and recruit them in chapter offices of their political parties but do precious little to deal with the factors that draw the youth to far-flung places away from home. The remittance economy has resulted in a substantial part of the SAARC countries’ economies to be dependent on the money sent by expatriate workers but this has a big social cost too.

A major concern for governments is also the massive use these days of the social networking sites, platforms and newer technologies to recruit innocent minds to nefarious groups, gangs and criminal organizations. There are European young ladies who have joined the ISIS and young boys who by chance fall into the enticing but dangerous sites run by these organizations with radical causes. Not all governments are sophisticated to be able to block all sites that contain explosive content.

Tardy implementation of past agreements or lack of seriousness on this issue has led to the belief that SAARC is non-functional on the twin subjects of countering radicalism and terrorism. Although the Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism was agreed upon even before the world woke up to the realities demonstrated by 9/11, SAARC as an organization has proven ineffective in dealing with the scourge of terrorism in South Asia. Responsibility for this enormous failure needs to be shared by all member states and cannot be shoved only on the ill-equipped Secretariat in Kathmandu.

Despite the problems these extremist outfits have created, no serious efforts were made by the governments or the civil society to curtail the rise in extremist trends at the initial stages. All of the regional states are facing the menace of extremism and terrorism in one form or other.

The largest state of SAARC – India has to take the lead in this issue. A spillover effect on India of the radicalization in Afghanistan-Pakistan and the Middle East cannot be ruled out. India, having the third largest Muslim population in the world, has not seen the kind of radicalization that has happened elsewhere. Indian Islam is considered very moderate. Though Muslim
religious leaders frequently vow that they do not allow the jihadist propaganda of the ISIS to infect the minds of Indian Muslims, the recent arrests of ISIS recruits demonstrates that India is not immune to terrorist designs. The Islamic State seems determined to spread its tentacles in India, mobilizing susceptible Muslim youth to retaliate against perceived injustices. If children of opportunity, rather than deprivation, are being attracted to the toxic seduction of radicalism and terrorism in the name of religion, then the existing counterterrorism strategy needs to be supplemented with a fresh approach. ²

Across South Asia, there is not enough data and correct documentation indicating the participation of youth in schools or colleges in terrorist activities and their links to terrorist organizations. Many governments have not been able to fulfil their very basic duties to the citizenry such as provision of health facilities and youth are either lured, abducted, or smuggled into terrorist organizations as is happening in the case of Naxalites. India has set-up various para-military units to fight the Naxalites but the government in the past has applied conflicting approaches to resolve the problem. Is Naxalism a terrorist threat? Is it a law and order problem? Is it a state subject or is it dealt by the Centre? Do the Naxals have cross-border linkages, especially with Nepal? Or is it only a social problem? No clear answers are ever forthcoming. The Indian Army has not been used to tame the Naxals. Only when they blow up rail-lines or attack a police convoy, do they come into the news. New para-military units and forces are formed by states and the Centre to deal with the situation but the Naxals are getting lethal year after year.

Many reports indicate that the process of radicalization and recruitment has taken place with the aid of individuals known to the participants. These people include teachers, parents, family members and other peers who apply pressure on youth. Even

though “some youths living in poor neighbourhoods gain attraction to the promise of money and material reward; others believe in the jihadist ideology, some have lost faith in dysfunctional politics, others look for adventure and for a clear set of rules and norms to follow, and yet others join because of peer or even family pressure”, says one report. Peer influence in the process of radicalization and recruitment, consequently, plays a crucial role as the youth in school need approval both at the institution level and at the community level. Peer pressure and influence also contribute to the dynamics of the individual from self to group. Again, the state has little control over this.

Deprivation, marginalization and perceived state violence or abuse of power are pushing young Africans into the clutches of violent extremism, a recent groundbreaking study by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has revealed.

The study explores the factors that shape the dynamics of the recruitment process, prompting some individuals to gravitate toward extremism, while the vast majority of others do not. The study findings show that many who joined violent extremist groups had faced marginalization and neglect over the course of their lives, starting in childhood.

The study suggests that individuals with few economic prospects or outlets for meaningful civic participation that can bring about change, and little trust in the state to either provide services or respect human rights, could – upon witnessing or experiencing perceived abuse of power by the state – be tipped over the edge into extremism.

Another issue is that recent trends in armed conflict have resulted in new challenges for the protection of children, especially in Afghanistan-Pakistan and in Jammu and Kashmir in India. Youth pelting stones is seen as indicative of bad education but never have the grass-root issues, such as why they are attracted to the ‘cause’, who recruits them, what social media sites do they visit, what are the ways to counter this situation, etc., been gone into.

Previously armed conflict involved confrontations between
states, whereas currently intra-state conflicts are more frequent. As battle lines become blurred, armed groups increasingly rely on explosive devices and suicide missions, as well as the use of children to carry out attacks as it happened in the case of the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Thankfully, the LTTE has now been comprehensively eliminated.

Both boys and girls have been targeted for recruitment and use by such groups, which indoctrinate and manipulate them in order to force the children to participate in hostilities, including acts of extreme violence. Youngsters are unaware of the consequences of the acts they are manipulated or coerced to commit, which explains the current situation in some parts of Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, but we in South Asia too need to be aware of the fact that this can easily spread its tentacles in our region, if we choose to do nothing.

In terms of regional cooperation, endeavors such as SAARC, BIMSTEC and BBIN, - all these regional or sub-regional organizations - have not been successful in dealing with the scourge of terrorism or radicalization nor on issues of migration and refugees, although almost all member states face these challenges. There is a greater need for civil society and track-II to play a more active role because the states governments of South Asia are not going to be able to resolve these problems all by themselves.
Ridding Afghanistan of Youth Radicalization Leading to Violent Extremism

By Shafeek Seddiq

Abstract

Since 1978, Afghanistan has experienced external and internal wars and conflicts rendering it comatose in the 1990s. The contributing factors resulting in the continuous conflict in Afghanistan are also, to an extent, symptomatic of South Asia proffering it as a fertile ground for youth radicalization leading to violent extremism. How, then, can we free a quarter of the world’s population in possession of vast rich resources from this affliction?

First, an examination of the symptoms of youth radicalization leading to violent extremism in Afghanistan, as well as its prognosis, are necessary before offering treatment. Second, ascertaining whether Afghanistan is an isolated case or whether it constitutes an element of a larger organism is necessary. If it is an isolated case, it is necessary to determine whether it is redeemable, and if on the other hand it is part of a larger diseased organism, then treatment must be aligned to address both the specific and the larger symptoms. As such, this essay will address methodically the current trends in youth radicalization in Afghanistan within the context of the larger organism of South Asia, identify the drivers of youth radicalization leading to violent extremism, determine
the likely outcome of the current trends, and offer specific and general prescriptions for ridding Afghanistan and South Asia of this ailment.

Introduction

For nearly 40 years, Afghanistan has experienced external and internal wars and conflicts granting it the dubious title of a failed state in the 1990s. Depending on one’s academic view, in the early years of 2000 following the United States led International Security Force (ISAF) intervention, Afghanistan was considered a post-conflict/conflict state; and after the withdrawal of the ISAF combat military force in December 2014, it is now considered a conflict/fragile state again. To some extent Afghanistan’s misfortune is shared by the rest of the South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) - home to a quarter of the world’s population with vast rich resources that could elevate the economic and political fortunes of the people if it were to address the root causes of the ailment affecting it.

Unfortunately, South Asia is still a fertile ground for youth radicalization leading to violent extremism. In 2017 alone, South Asia experienced a total of 3,430 terrorist attacks.

Image from the Global Terrorism Database, University of Maryland, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)
As the image above indicates a high concentration of the world terrorists’ attacks is in South Asia of which the majority of attacks occurred in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. Of the many groups involved in the conflict and terrorist attacks, in Afghanistan, the Taliban and Khorasan Province of the Islamic State are responsible for the most. In 2017, the Taliban engaged in 907 attacks resulting in 4,925 deaths, and the Khorasan Province of the Islamic State claimed to have perpetrated 1,957 attacks resulting in 1,302 deaths. In India, the Communist Party of India – Maoist perpetrated 317 attacks resulting in 223 deaths and in Pakistan Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) mounted 106 attacks resulting in 500 deaths. Nepal also experienced a spike of 474% increase in terrorist attacks, which however were not lethal. Every South Asian country has experienced terrorist attacks and ample signs of continued escalation of violent extremism exist. Additionally, Afghanistan has seen some major terrorist attacks in 2018 resulting in the deaths of hundreds of Afghans and a constant fear prevails that the trends may once again lead to state failure. In August 2018 alone more than 40 high school students were killed in their classrooms in Kabul, and hundreds were killed in the Taliban attack on Ghazni city.

These attacks have affected the economy and human security in South Asia and in Afghanistan rendered a generation of Afghans in a constant state of trauma. Ample medical evidence exists showing the traumatic effect of war on the psyche of soldiers and those who experience bombings and other armed attacks. Afghans have lived daily through bombings, suicide attacks, harassment and torture, whether imposed by internal or external conflict or by the government, warlords, and common criminals, for 40 years. Afghans need a long breather from it all to recoup themselves psychologically first and then focus on rebuilding a country where human security flourishes. To provide this break to Afghans in general, but particularly to the youth who are the most vulnerable group targeted for radicalization, legitimate grievances must be redressed. However, first we must explore and understand the trends and drivers of radicalization leading to violent extremism in youth in Afghanistan.
Trends in Youth Radicalization

Persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years are considered ‘youth’ under the United Nations (UN) programs, however, national definitions of ‘youth’ may differ based on the programs individual nations implement and could range anywhere between the ages of 15 and 35 years. In many programs in Afghanistan ‘youth’ are classified between the ages of 15 and 32 years. Of the estimated population of 34 million, nearly 60 percent are considered youth. Media and government reports indicate that the majority of those involved in terrorism and violent extremism in Afghanistan are youth. Without reliable baseline data to compare with and without proper indicators to measure trends in radicalization, it is difficult to conclude with certainty the trend in radicalization in general, let alone that trend in the case of youth. Still, some independent surveys, Taliban casualties, and the emergence of the Vilayat-e (Province) Khurasan indicate three distinct trends in youth radicalization. The radicalization taking place amongst university students does not necessarily lead to violent extremism, whereas radicalization effected by the Taliban necessarily leads to violent extremism. Furthermore, the Daesh splinter of the Khurasan Province of the Islamic State have not only established the creation of a more extremist splinter group trend in Afghanistan but has the potential to spread throughout South Asia, and in some instances similar groups have already surfaced.

In 2017, as part of the study on terrorism recruitment, the Afghanistan Justice Organization (AJO) met with the Afghanistan National Directorate of Security (NDS) and the Anti-Terrorism Prosecution Department (ATPD) and learned that at any given time there are between 150-200 boys aged 12-17 in intelligence custody and detention. The worse-case was an attempt by a 10-year old girl, Spogmay, from Khan Nashin, Helmand, who was allegedly forced by her brother to carry out a suicide attack. Spogmay, however, chose to surrender to the police in Khan Nashin.

Universities in provinces such as Kabul, Kandahar and
Nangarhar with historic political gravitation provide a higher level of radicalization and are incubators for exposing students to radicalized ideologies. The Universities themselves do not promote extremism, however, the lax venue provides this opportunity for extremists’ groups to infiltrate and radicalize the students. At times, the radicalization leads to violence inside the university amongst the various ethnic groups and at other times, students have simply quit and joined the Taliban. The 60 students who demonstrated on May 21, 2016, in front of Kabul University demanding the release of a professor who had been arrested under suspicion of working with one of the extremist groups is demonstrative evidence of the trends in youth radicalization that take place in universities. And it is indicative of the level of influence violent extremists may have in universities and perhaps of sympathizers lurking in and around the universities.

The other indicator to measure the trend in radicalization is to assess the casualties the Taliban suffered through the years and its replenishment with fresh foot soldiers and suicide bombers. The Media and both the Afghan government and the ISAF before its combat military units’ withdrawal in December 2014, reported what amounted to nearly a thousand Taliban killed a month. Yet, there has been no decrease in the total of roughly 20,000 to 40,000 Taliban, for years. Either the estimate for past years is faulty, or the Taliban recruitment outpaces the casualties it sustains. Under either scenario the result is not favorable, as the trends in radicalization continue to rise or spread. Such trends are certainly a concern to Afghanistan which faces the brunt of terrorism, as well as to South Asia in general.

Cultural and religious radicalization among youths particularly in rural areas is common in Afghanistan. The abiding code of conduct in rural areas to protect land and family honor at any cost is a contributing factor in youth radicalization. So many young individuals take up arms to regain honor for themselves, their family, and their culture. In other instances, family history and traditions of elders play an influencing role. Parents in some instances encourage
their young sons to engage in violent acts. Extremist groups and the Taliban utilize religion as a tool through which the recruited individuals can focus their anger at the ‘infidel’ invaders and their ‘puppet government’ in Kabul. Although religion is not the only main cause of radicalization in Afghanistan, religious leaders and religious institutions remain vital elements of the radicalization process there.

The inactivity of the State resulting in the continued prevalence of poverty, unemployment, and a low standard of education combined with acts of injustice perpetrated through military attacks and foreign influence has resulted in violence that the government has countered with hard security measures. In such a situation, and with the expansion of violent extremism in the county, the previously secure provinces have become flooded with violent groups who have a freehand to administer their own form of justice, education, and the provision of civic amenities. They are able to convince the people about their cause, not necessarily through force or propaganda, but through their service provision.

Large parts of Afghan society continue to be frustrated by physical insecurity, government corruption, poverty and growing social inequality. These frustrations are easily manipulated by radical groups and they make many Afghans vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization, particularly when their dissatisfaction is provoked by mistrust of the government or the international community. Poverty and unemployment are often believed to be the key contributing factors in radicalizing youth; joining a violent radical group just to escape social deprivation by receiving a salary and thereby securing support for their family.

Religion is only one of several reasons for joining or supporting the insurgency. A religious message does resonate with the majority, but this is mainly because it is understood in terms of two keenly felt rational grievances: the corruption of government and the presence of foreign forces.
Drivers of Radicalization and Its Likely Outcome

While ‘radicalization’ is easy to define and comprehend in its simplest form, that definition is difficult to apply, identify and differentiate between the radical individual who is non-violent and the one who espouses violence to achieve political and religious objectives.

Academics, practitioners, and policy makers agree that this multifaceted and dynamic process called radicalization has the potential of ultimately resulting in producing terrorists. Brian Jenkins, a renowned terrorism scholar, defines radicalization as “the process of adopting for oneself or inculcating in others a commitment not only to a system of beliefs, but to their imposition on the rest of society.” While there are other variations of what radicalization means, there are also difficulties with understanding the drivers: what induces an individual to become radicalized and be a violent extremist? A range of what are called “push” and “pull” factors have been developed to understand this process. Literature abounds with theories of such factors. Many such studies adopt the view that radicalization eventually leads to violent extremism. Any external influences that push someone to radicalization are considered “push factors” and any factors leading to radicalization and violent extremism resulting in any personal and emotional gratification are considered “pull factors”.

In 2015-16, the Afghanistan Justice Organization (AJO) surveyed 205 Taliban inmates representing 30 out of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan to gather their views on the factors that lead to radicalization. Unemployment, corruption, moral and emotional issues, and the existence of a government perceived as un-Islamic, emerged as the four major drivers of radicalization leading to violent extremism.
Unemployment was understood to mean not having a job and not earning income to take care of your family. While a job provides that safety, it alone does not eliminate the deep-seated frustration youth experience daily in Afghanistan. Corruption in government meant a variety of things including public officials taking bribes, lack of redress of grievances and oppressive law enforcement. The moral and emotional category in the survey findings was explained to mean avenging the loss of a close relative in the war, experiencing perceived injustice at the hands of the government including the armed forces (Afghan and ISAF), emotional disturbance arising from night raids and drone bombs killing families etc. Surprisingly, the last major driver was the perception that the government of Afghanistan is un-Islamic because there is no Shari’a in the country, the President is a puppet and there are foreign forces occupying our country.

A large number of “push” and “pull” factors operate to lure young Afghans to radicalization. Some convicted militants expressed sentiments like the following to their interviewers: “we
are being fooled by Mullahs in Mosques and Madrasas”, “the ISI is stealing our children and training them”, “we don’t have any education”, “tribal rivalries pushed me …”, “I was told Jihad is mandatory”, and “the judges are corrupt”.

Media has also reported to confirm such factors as those mentioned above as leading to radicalization to some extent. In November 2014, the New York Times reported that civilians in Kandahar also “feel aggrieved” because of the way the police treat them.

“Earlier this year, Ikhlass Muhammad, 13, was abducted by a police commander and kept at a station in Pashmul for use as a sex slave, said his father, Khan Muhammad, an agricultural laborer. After Mr. Muhammad demanded his son’s release, the police dumped the boy’s bloodied body outside his front door, claiming he had been killed in crossfire during a fight with the Taliban. Mr. Muhammad took the case to court, but a judge privately advised him to give up because the police were involved. “What sort of justice is this?” Mr. Muhammad said angrily, holding out a photo of his son.

Surveys done by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), and other institutes resulted in identifying similar drivers of radicalization including economic factors, discrimination relating to ethnic and religious affiliation exposure to radical views propagated through social media, government corruption, marginalization, harassment by government officials, impunity for wrong-doers, and lack of redress or adequate redress of legitimate grievances, such as land disputes, losing relatives in military bombings or operations, and court decisions tainted with corruption.

The above findings do not necessarily suggest ideological indoctrination resulting in radicalization. However, religion for the most part preys on those vulnerabilities and turns those concerned into ideological radicalization. Religion basically seals the deal with
the at-risk population. Because the grievances are nationwide, it necessarily calls for fundamental changes in society and government. And the only way a young Afghan and others similarly situated can redress their grievances mentioned above appears to them to be to join the Taliban or other similar groups. The Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Khurasan Province Islamic State, Al Qaeda, Daesh, and Tehrik-e Taliban of Pakistan are violent extremists and engage in terrorism to achieve goals of their dubious ideology about government and not necessarily in the best interests of the at-risk individuals or groups. As these are armed groups, the likely outcome for anyone joining them is going to be involvement in violent extremism.

While no single road leads to radicalization in Afghanistan, for the purposes of this study, the following table summarizes the types of and factors driving radicalization, based on research and past experience in preventing and countering violent extremism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Factor</th>
<th>Factors or drivers of radicalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divisions</td>
<td>Ethnic, linguistic, religious polarization, internal community divides, isolation, weak community leadership/infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grievances</td>
<td>Under-employment, poverty or lack of education, political/democratic disenfranchisement, discrimination, lack of justice, corruption, warlordism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narratives</td>
<td>Political movements, Islamic/religious ideology; presence of foreign forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means</td>
<td>Violent extremists’ propaganda/narrative, social/family/criminal networks, vulnerable/risky institutions and places (schools, universities, mosques, madrasas), vulnerable individuals, charismatic individuals</td>
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Transformation to Violent Extremism

The acceptable theory for terrorism and violent extremism is that those who commit violent acts aim at attaining a political, economic, religious or ideological goal which is otherwise not attainable through peaceful means for a variety of reasons. As such, the violent act perpetrated against an individual or innocent civilian is against all the precepts of International Humanitarian Law whenever they target non-combatants, and is aimed to coerce or intimidate, or convey a message to a larger audience. But, what propels one to engage in such violent acts?

A large number of researches and studies exist, especially since September 2011, that provide conceptual frameworks for radicalization leading to violent extremism and terrorism. The basic theoretical process, as shown above through empirical studies, is for the terrorists, violent extremists, and in the Afghanistan case the Taliban, to transform one’s vulnerabilities and grievances into hatred of a target group and then build up that hatred to morph into justifying violence. Among the various conceptual models, the Maghaddam’s model, “The Staircase to Terrorism” is probably the most applicable to the process of radicalization leading to violent extremism in Afghanistan. The image below graphically indicates the step by step progression of individuals from the first initiation to radical ideology to full-fledged participation in terrorism.

The Staircase to Terrorism

The process, the theory assumes, is that people who experience adversity and want to alleviate their situation will flock in to the Ground Floor. As some of these people attempt to improve their situation, but fail, they will move up to the First Floor, a floor of frustration producing feelings of aggression. In some of these people the aggression will build up moving them to the Second Floor where this aggression is displaced onto some perceived group or agent who is now considered an enemy. Now that the
enemy has an identity, some of these people will build their anger towards that enemy and move up to the Third Floor where they become sympathetic to violent, extremist ideology and the terrorist group. The Fourth Floor represents some of those people who have actually joined the violent extremist and terrorist groups, and the highest stage of conversion is achieved in the Fifth floor where some of these people will actually engage in terrorism and violent extremism.

Taliban are using this textbook process in the Afghan context where violent extremism is associated with terrorism. The Taliban and other groups use religion, Islam, as the link that ratchets the individual personal grievance-based radicalization to violent extremism. Taliban are cognizant of the vulnerability of the country’s 80 percent population who are illiterate, do not have access to education, healthcare, and relies heavily on tradition. They can be swayed easily especially when the Afghan government is unable to provide security, and services for its citizens. As such, usually the last straw is, as various surveys have concluded, religion, Islam, that motivates violent extremism. The satisfaction of vengeance and the daily trauma the young Afghan suffers from - terrorists, warlords, the government, criminals, and international forces and the despair of future all lead to the imaginable promises of the afterlife: the supreme achievement which is the Fifth Floor. Thus, the Staircase to Terrorism. And the following NY Times story is a quintessential illustration of this process. A certain Mr. Mohammad enters the Ground Floor because his son is killed and branded a Taliban. He complains to the justice system but is shunned and turned away. He moves up to the First Floor where he builds up anger for the injustice he suffered and his murdered son. The Second Floor shows him who the enemy is: the corrupt, incompetent and prejudicial justice system of Afghanistan, thus by extension the government. He directs his anger towards the judge, the justice system, and the government of Afghanistan. In the Third Floor he finds a friend in the group (the Taliban) who shows sympathy and introduces him to violent extremism. Continuing to look for justice and not finding it,
he resorts to the alternative of vengeance and moves to the Fourth Floor and joins the Taliban. To fulfil his destiny, he moves up to the Fifth Floor where the Taliban equips him with guns and explosive and he attacks the courthouse of Pashmul District of Kandahar killing the judge, the guards, the staff and other users like him of the court. He is now fulfilled.

Effective Prescription for Preventing and Countering Radicalization to Violent Extremism

In Afghanistan, radicalization to a large extent is the result of ideological indoctrination (Islamist extremism) interpreting the Shari’a, the negative image and perception of the government (foreign invasion, puppet un-Islamic and corrupt government), unemployment, and emotional involvement (close relatives killed during a military operation). The latter could also be attributed to tradition and history. As evidenced by the daily reports from Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the media there is a high incidence of the members of Taliban and forces opposed to the government killed, injured, or captured during military operations or attacks; yet despite such sustained losses, Taliban continues to produce suicide bombers and mount, at times, major attacks on provincial districts. How are the Taliban able to continue to recruit? Taliban radicalization methods and messages must be very effective to continue to recruit young Afghans by preying on their vulnerabilities. Afghan Taliban successfully seizes these vulnerabilities to alienate young Afghans and radicalize them against foreign forces and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GI RoA), which it calls an illegitimate dependent of the West. The Taliban disseminates its radicalization narrative in poetry, music, and video, transmitted through websites such as “Islamic Emirates – Alemarah”, videos, and the social media – particularly Facebook.

What do we prescribe to prevent and counter this radicalization leading to violent extremism? Admittedly, the best remedy is to
address and resolve the legitimate grievances that catalyze individuals or groups to become radicalized and pursues violence as a means to redress those grievances. Prescribing such a remedy necessarily leads to a host of conflicting views, ideas and philosophies (Shari’a or Civil Laws) given the situation of contending players (Afghan Government and Taliban) with their different ideologies, goals and objectives. This makes it difficult to identify the grievances and determine their legitimacy (for instance is Afghanistan an un-Islamic country), let alone identifying specific solutions (Islamic Rule, Change the Constitution, Power Sharing). The prescription should, therefore, be proportionate to the disease eventually removing it from the body. Instantly, the treatment should include remedies methodically applied to prevent radicalization, counter the narratives, de-radicalize, disengage, rehabilitate, and reintegrate.

The first step is to actively prevent radicalization at the root. Afghanistan needs to adopt a national strategy of preventing and countering violent extremism in which, among other things, how the legitimate grievances of the Afghans will be addressed is outlined. While there is no single way leading to radicalization as evidenced by theoretical and empirical studies, in Afghanistan common thematic areas emerged that leads to radicalization and violent extremism. As such, the Government of Afghanistan with the help of the international allies and engagement of civil societies must address the security concerns, provide the legal framework for justice as well as equal economic opportunities, human security, political voice and freedom of speech, and it must fight corruption.

The Afghan government must strengthen public institutions and eradicate corruption, poverty and unemployment to develop confidence among the youth encouraging them to play their role in the development of their country. Youth is the strength of Afghanistan and being a whopping majority of the population, they could form a significant social entity, engaged as peace makers and change makers. They could also form a group of advocates for tolerance and religious harmony.

The Afghan government must strengthen the capacity of the
government institutions to respond to the needs of youth, providing livelihood skills and training for youth and engaging with the youth on the local, regional and national levels to ensure that they have a voice in the development of Afghanistan. The government must also promote volunteerism for peace and development with the creation of a youth volunteer corps. Further, it must engage mullahs, local imams and religious scholars to carry out their responsibility in eradicating the problem of radicalization and extremism.

The Afghan government and the international community can also engage the services of civil societies, community leaders and former combatants who can help prevent radicalization in youth. The former extremists who are now engaged in normal life can be effective in discouraging youths in their communities from following their previous path.

To counter radicalization, the Afghan Government, civil society and the media must form an alliance and arrive at an understanding to “counter-the-Taliban-narrative”. Such an understanding leads to countering each harmful narrative and engaging intended and potential audience specifically, but the counter-narrative should never ignore the essence of why the Taliban’s narrative is so appealing in the first place, as evidenced, in the recruitment of the Taliban to replenish those they lose daily to suicide bombings and attacks.

If, by chance, the opportunity to prevent or counter radicalization is missed, then equal efforts must be made to design a de-radicalization program helping the patient to rid himself of the disease. Unfortunately, Afghanistan does not have a robust de-radicalization program. With more than 7,000 terrorists (usually referred to in Afghanistan as political prisoners) in prisons around the country with the majority held in the Bagram and Poli-e-Charkhi prisons, it is imperative for Afghanistan and the international donors to design and implement in prisons a robust de-radicalization program, that addresses the crux of the problem and considers the Islamic training program. Furthermore, a successful de-radicalization program must include disengagement
and rehabilitation, otherwise the risk of recidivism exists.

Reintegration is the last remedy to apply after release from the de-radicalization program. There are many methods to reintegrate the violent extremist into the community, including giving them employment opportunities, engagement by the community elders and the police and acceptance by the community. Civil society can be engaged for collaboration with relevant government institutions and the community to monitor and evaluate the progress of integration. This ensures complete cure and reduces the chance of recidivism.

**Conclusion**

For the Taliban and any other violent extremist group operating in Afghanistan and South Asia, the goal is to use radicalization as a precursor culminating in violent extremism. Afghanistan and South Asia must adopt national strategies to prevent and counter radicalization leading to violent extremism. The strategy should outline a methodical approach to eliminating violent extremism by first addressing radicalization. Therefore, the most important factor in understanding the trends is first to understand the process of radicalization, the very nature of the drivers (“Push” and “Pull” factors”) of those who become violent extremists.-

It is self-evident that a generation of Afghans has now grown up in violence, war and conflict utterly traumatizing the nation. In such a situation no big efforts are required to radicalize, although Afghans are resilient and have rejected the Taliban way of life and their government. If South Asia as a whole could overcome its internal differences, most of which relate to border problems and religious, ethnic and kleptocratic regimes, and form a union for the benefit of the people, Afghanistan may yet have a chance to rid itself of violent extremism. Otherwise, Afghanistan will continue to be at the mercy, to an extent, of the whims of South Asia.

The alternative remedy is for Afghanistan, the Afghans and international allies to implement a robust preventing and countering
radicalization program methodically addressing every single step of the process of radicalization and de-radicalization. This essay has shown how radicalization occurs in Afghanistan, and how to prevent and counter it. As such, an integrated and multilateral approach to preventing and countering radicalization that leads to violent extremism in Afghanistan and South Asia is the best remedy. Finally, it is the intent of this essay to promote important internal and external (within the South Asian region) collaboration in further research and dialogue to overcome differences and rid Afghanistan and South Asia of radicalism leading to violent extremism.

Acknowledgement

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Trends in Youth Radicalization in Sri Lanka

By Samal Vimukthi Hemachandra

Introduction

In March 2018, the whole country was on hold due to the violence unleashed on Muslims in Kandy District by Sinhala Buddhist extremists. The overwhelming majority of the arrested for committing violence against Muslims were youth from the Sinhala Buddhist community. This is the latest incident of a long thread of youth related violence. Considering youth radicalism in post-independent Sri Lanka, it is a complex and a multi-faceted phenomenon. However, it is not known whether the state has understood or, at least, has tried to understand this complexity. Due to the state’s inability to address youth radicalism effectively, Sri Lanka witnessed two armed struggles in the southern part of the country in 1971 and 1987-89 and a 30-year civil war that lasted from the 1970s to 2009 in the northern part of the country. Even after the end of the civil war in 2009, a new wave of violent extremism has emerged with the ethno-religious tension between Sinhala Buddhists and Muslims.

In the global discourse on the term, radicalism, it is considered to be a negative phenomenon. This is mainly due to the 9/11 terrorist attack and the war against terror which was launched after it. The widely used terms such as countering radicalism or de-radicalization are good indications of the negative perception of the

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3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T01J4yGGp2Q
term, radicalism. Also, this term is mostly associated at present with religion in general and with Islam in particular. Michael Chertoff, the Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security from 2005 to 2009, defined radicalism as “the ideas that drive the terrorist" (Chertoff 2008: 11). This is exactly why Ömer Taspınar has argued that “fighting ‘radicalism’ rather than ‘terrorism’ provides a better paradigm and framework” (Taspınar 2009: 76).

However, contrary to this popular belief, I will argue in this essay that radicalism is not inherently negative, but can instead have a positive impact if it is directed properly. In order to do this, I will begin by defining radical and radicalization. Then I will give a brief historical analysis of youth radicalism in Sri Lanka. It will be followed by an analysis of youth radicalism in present day Sri Lanka. Finally, I will discuss how present day youth radicalism should be addressed.

**Radical and Radicalization**

Robert C. Tucker, in his article ‘The Deradicalization of Marxist Movements,’ posits three characteristics to understand a radical. The first characteristic is that the radical is someone who rejects or denies the existing reality. “He mentally and emotionally rebels against the existing order, repudiates the world as it stands, or as he perceives it to stand” (Tucker 1967: 346). His negative experiences and perceptions on the existing reality due to economic, political, social and cultural inequalities and injustices have made him to reject the existing reality. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report on preventing violent extremism points out eight drivers that can lead to radical behavior. Seven out of these eight drivers⁴ provide a clear picture of the problems in the existing reality.

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⁴ I left out the eighth driver which is “changing global culture and banalization of violence in media and entertainment” (UNDP 2016: 22) due to its irrelevance with Tucker’s characterization.
The first driver that is described in the report is “the impact of regional and global geo-politics that have destabilized regimes or inflamed regional or sub-regional tensions” (UNDP 2016: 19). For instance, the role and activities of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka in late 80s have radicalized both Sinhala and Tamil youth which brought the whole country into a massive turmoil during the late 1980s. The second driver is “economic exclusion, unemployment and limited opportunities for upward mobility” (UNDP ibid 19). Since class, caste, ethnic, religious and cultural inequalities prevail in the Sri Lankan society, Marxist movements in Sri Lanka from the 1930s to the present have thrived on this factor to mobilize radical youth in Sri Lanka. The third driver is “political exclusion and shrinking civil space” (UNDP ibid 19). During President Mahindha Rajapaksa’s period, the youth who felt themselves excluded from the political space due to their ideals like democracy, freedom and equality and civil activists who were suppressed in the public sphere, have used Facebook as a platform to express their grievances (Hemachandra 2017). “Injustice, corruption and mistreatment of certain groups” (UNDP ibid 21) is the forth driver. The Facebook campaign for the common opposition candidate in the 2015 Presidential election can be pointed out as to how youth were actively involved in radical politics which targeted the acts of injustice, corruption, violence and mistreatment directed at certain groups conducted by the Mahindha Rajapaksa government (Hemachandra 2017).

“Rejection of the socio-economic and political system” (UNDP ibid 21) is another driver that radicalizes youth. Demands by Marxists for Marxism as an alternative for the capitalism and by ultra-nationalists for a monarchy⁵ as against democracy are perfect examples for the rejection of present economic and political

⁵ Heralding President Rajapaksa as raja (king) or maharaja (great king) and connecting his lineage to Lord Buddha’s are popular examples for demanding a Sinhala Buddhist just king by ultra-nationalists.
systems in Sri Lanka. Due to the complex identity formations in Sri Lanka, “rejection of growing diversity in society” (UNDP ibid 22) functions as a key driver of radicalization. Throughout its post-independence history, the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists have used violence against the minorities from time to time due to the fear of losing their supremacy in the country. This operated as one of the key factors in the emergence of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The final driver posited by the UNDP is “weak state capacity and falling security” (UNDP ibid 22). For instance, the Sri Lankan state has failed to provide basic rights and security to its citizens, especially the minorities, resulting in three armed insurrections. These seven drivers illustrate the problems of the existing reality which have been rejected by the radical.

The second characterization of a radical, according to Tucker, is that he “is not simply a rebel but a visionary” (Tucker 1967: 346). In that regard, he does not stop at rejecting the existing reality. Instead, he believes in an alternative universe or a perfect social order which does not have the negatives in the existing reality. It can be a communist society, as Marxists believe or heaven as religious extremists believe. Either way, the radical imagines an ideal society, a society which has negated the negativity of the existing order. The final characteristic of a radical, according to Tucker, is that he “not only rejects existing reality; he wants and seeks to transform it” (Tucker 1967: 347). We can see radicals laboring to transform the existing order to their ideal society in a wide range of activities. For example, it can be a simple nonviolent act such as posting on Facebook, criticizing the government, or an extremely violent act such as suicide bombing. Before the collapse of Berlin Wall, which signified the end of Communism, the Marxist movement was the main attraction for radicals as the main approach of transforming the existing reality into their ideal society. However, since the early 1990s to the present, Communism has been replaced by religious extremism and nationalism in most parts of the world. Sri Lanka in this regard is no exception.

In this characterization, the radical is not a person who is inherently negative but a person who seeks solutions for the
problems that arise in the existing reality. This makes a radical, as Descartes would say, ‘a thinking being’ rather than an irrational being as described in popular discourse on terrorism. In this regard, radicalization of a person is a useful process in any society to eradicate the negativity of the existing reality.

As with Tucker’s characterization of a radical as described previously, the UNDP report too has recognized that radicalization is not inherently a negative phenomenon. According to this report, what makes radicalization a negative phenomenon is its transformation into a violent movement. If radicalization remains nonviolent, then it can have a positive impact on society (UNDP 2016: 24). Radicalization is a reaction to the negativity of the existing reality and it seeks to transform this negativity into positivity by its activism. However, transforming radicalism into violent extremism by using violence to achieve its goals would have a negative impact on society. As Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the greatest civil rights activists in the 20th century has stated,

“The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.” (King, Jr. 1968: 64-65)

Following King, Jr.’s understanding of violence, the next section brings out a historical analysis of youth radicalism in post-independent Sri Lanka. It discusses both the positive trends in radicalism, which used nonviolence, and negative trends in radicalism, which depended on violence to achieve its goals in different periods of post-independent Sri Lanka.
The History of Youth Radicalization in Post-Independence Sri Lanka

The 70 years since Sri Lanka became an independent state breaking away from the British Empire has witnessed a youth radicalization of a complex nature, in the country. Different periods had their own positive and negative radicalisms. Therefore, this section is divided into four periods to have a comprehensive picture of youth radicalization. Since the youth radicalization in the present context needs special attention, a whole section has been devoted to it.

1930s-1960s

Though there were seeds of youth radicalism in the temperance movement in the beginning of the 20th century, the youth radicalism as a modern political form emerged during the 1930s with the rise of workers movement and the leftist movement. As a result, youth radicalism was mainly connected with traditional left politics. This trend was the dominant phenomenon till the 1960s.

Though the main leftist political parties such as the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and Sri Lanka Communist Party accepted using violence from a theoretical point of view, in practice, they used nonviolent methods such as contesting elections, workers’ strikes and peaceful protests to achieve their political goals, such as creating a socialist state. Due to their influence, Sri Lankan society witnessed the adoption of universal ideals such as equality, freedom and democracy. For instance, the politics and the popularity of the left had a significant impact in areas where caste oppression was predominant, resulting in a decline in the caste consciousness. Also, the success in winning labor rights such as the eight hour working day and the improvement of the welfare of the workers was another positive achievement of Marxist politics. Along with these, the Marxist parties played a key role in developing Sri Lanka as a welfare state with their influence on the implementation of free
education and free healthcare system.

Youth radicalism among Tamils in the north and in plantation areas was visible in both left politics and in Tamil party politics. As opposed to violence-driven approaches used by Tamil youth in the final quarter of the 20th century, Tamil youth radicalism in this period kept faith on nonviolent methods, such as strikes, boycotts and peaceful protests, to bargain with the government. The Jaffna Youth Congress (JYC), in this regard, is highly influential on Tamil youth in Jaffna. Arranging Mahatma Gandhi’s visit to Jaffna in 1927 made them popular among the Tamil youth. They called for a complete boycott of the Donoughmore Commission due to the Commission’s inability to grant full independence to the island. As a result, they conducted a successful campaign in the north, boycotting the first election under the new Donomourgh Constitution which resulting no nominations from Jaffna (Kadirgamar 2013: 80-93). Moreover, Lanka Sama Samaja party, the most prominent leftist party during that period, received massive support from plantation workers. For example, they conducted a wave of strikes of plantation workers during 1939-40 to obtain the right to organization, which was deprived from them by the colonial rulers (Goonewardene 1960). Due to the leftist parties’ rejection of communalism during this period, leftist politics was attractive to the Tamil youth. As a result, there were leftist parliamentarians from these Tamil dominated areas. On the other hand, the Tamil nationalist politicians also rallied the Tamil youth around them under the demand of more state power for Tamils. However, the government’s lack of response to Tamil demands, in general and the enactment of the Sinhala only act in 1956 in particular, made the Federal party the most prominent in the North. After 1956 the Federal party “advocated a federal system of government with considerable autonomy for the Tamil regions” (Kearney 1985: 903). However, it has to be highlighted that Tamil politics were during this period using nonviolent methods to achieve their demands.

Contrary to the above mentioned positive radicalism, the 1950s witnessed the emergence of negative radicalization in the use
of communal violence against Tamil minority by Sinhala Buddhist nationalists. In 1956 and 1958, Tamils were attacked and many were killed by Sinhala Buddhist extremists. Being a minority in a global context, minority complex played a key role in the mind of the Sinhala Buddhist extremist and as a result, they reacted violently to anything they perceived as a threat to their power and existence in Sri Lanka. This was exactly what was meant by a Sinhala politician when he stated, “[i]n this country the problem of the Tamils is not a minority problem. The Sinhalese are the minority in Dravidastan. “We are carrying on a struggle for our national existence against the Dravidastan majority” (in Kearney 1985: 903).

The mid 1960s saw the decline of the traditional left which brought negative youth radicalization into forefront of the Sri Lankan politics.

1960s - 1971

The period between 1960 and 1971 is a vital period in regard to the nature of youth radicalization in Sri Lanka. Youth radicalism during this period, for the first time in Sri Lankan history, experimented with violence on a grand scale. As a result, this period determined the fate of post-1971 Sri Lanka.

The hegemony of the traditional left was shattered when the LSSP formed a coalition with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party in 1964. Since then, the traditional left in general has been criticized for its reformism and for its inability to fulfil its socialist dream. As a result, the mid 1960s saw the emergence of a new left in Sri Lanka with the emergence of the People’s Liberation Front (JVP). The JVP “consisted primarily of youthful leadership addressing youthful audience. The leadership, without exception, came from the unprivileged social classes, none of them had access to power and privilege within the existing structure of society” (Keerawella 1982: 78). Unlike the traditional left, the JVP “unanimously rejected Parliamentary politics as a capitalist maneuver to withhold real state power from the people and they insisted upon revolutionary direct
action, particularly armed revolution by the people” (Keerawella 1982: 79).

As a result, the JVP launched an unsuccessful armed struggle in 1971 to capture state power. The state managed to put an end to this uprising after a couple of months, through massive state violence unleashed against the rebels. According to K.M De Silva, this is the largest youth revolt recorded in history (De Silva 2008: 663).

1971-1994

During the period between 1971 and 1994, the whole country witnessed bloodshed due to the violent killings of the state forces and non-state actors. In this regard, three main trends of violent extremism can be pointed out in this period.

The first trend is the rise of violent extremism in the North and East provinces with the emergence of the LTTE. The traditional left’s alignment with Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in the 1970s made them unattractive to the Tamil youth. At the same time, Tamil political parties and leading Tamil politicians began a serious call for a separate Tamil state in 1970 (Kearney 1985: 903) which became highly attractive to the Tamil youth.

However, the Tamil youth too were frustrated with their traditional leadership which was unsuccessful in using nonviolence to gain their political goals. With the experience of the 1971 revolt in the South, the Tamil youth saw “how imperiled the government military forces were in this conflict” (Matthews 1986: 31). The LTTE announced their emergence by killing the Jaffna Mayor in 1975. Due to the actions of the government in subsequent years and the Indian Peace Keeping Force after the Indian intervention much later, the LTTE became extremely popular among Tamil youths.

The second trend was the re-emergence of the JVP as a more organized violent force in the mid-80s. Due to JVP’s violent outburst, the whole country was in jeopardy during the 1987/89
period. The general belief is that 60,000 youth were brutally killed during the period. However, it will be an injustice to the JVP for the sole blame to be foisted on them for this death toll because the United National Party government, with the support of the military mechanism, went on killing anyone they suspected as a supporter of the JVP. Since the JVP could not proceed with its revolution due to state repression, the whole JVP leadership strata (except for one politburo member) had been brutally murdered by the end of 1989.

The third trend in this period was the violence against Tamil civilians by Sinhala Buddhist extremists, allegedly sometimes with the involvement of ruling government personalities. In 1982, the Jaffna Library, one of the best libraries in Asia, was burnt allegedly by state sponsored thugs from the South. In July 1983, many Tamils in the South were brutally murdered and their shops were burnt as a revenge for the killing 13 soldiers in the North by the LTTE. More than 2000 Tamils were killed and hundreds of thousands of Tamils fled to India as refugees. Tamils in the South fled to the North and as a result, the LTTE became a massive attraction to the Tamil youth.

Also, for a short period between 1987 and 1989, the youth in the South who were anti-JVP used counter violence to oppose the JVP violence. These youth organized themselves under the name ‘Pra’ and they were believed to be backed by the government.

As against these violent extremist trends, there was a positive youth radicalism with the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and opposition parties which used nonviolent methods such as *padayathra* and *sathyagraha* to promote human rights and democracy. With relation to the global phenomenon of the emergence of NGOs in the third world, Sri Lanka too witnessed an active role played by local NGOs in promoting democracy. A significant number of ex-rebels of the 1971 revolt, traditional leftist parties and human rights activists, during 80s, had a close relationship with the NGOs. At the same time, NGOs supported a number of political movements such as ‘Mothers’ Front’, which demanded justice and the protection of human rights. The Mothers’
Front in this context was an extraordinary phenomenon. As Malathí de Alwis has stated, “one of the most significant political outcomes of the 1980s and 1990s in Sri Lanka has been the collective mobilization of maternalism as a counter to violence, both in the context of the civil war in the north and east and the JVP uprising in the South” (de Alwis 2009:83). In 1984, the Mothers’ Front was formed in Jaffna against the mass arrest of Tamil youth done by the state military. This inspired the mothers in the East to form an eastern Mothers’ front to raise their voice against the killings of the members of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELÖ) by the LTTE. In 1990, a Mothers’ Front of Sinhala women was formed in the south to protest against the disappearance of their male kin during the JVP uprising from 1987 to 1990 (de Alwis 2009: 83-85). The Mothers’ Front in the South played a key role in defeating the United National Party (UNP) government. This is a key moment in post-independent political history of Sri Lanka because the 17 years of UNP rule in general has been considered as undemocratic and oppressive by many commentators.

1994 – 2009

The political landscape between 1994 and 2009 was determined by the civil war between the government and the LTTE. During this period, especially during President Rajapaksa’s period, ethnic and religious extremist tendencies were directed toward the fight against the LTTE. In other words, these tendencies were used to promote and support military forces among the youth and, as a result, the number of youth that joined military forces were high during the Rajapaksa government’s term. In this context, President Rajapaksa was able to organize the whole South under the nationalistic umbrella against LTTE.

The positive impact of this was that it did not provide space for ethno religious extremists to use violence on non-Sinhala Buddhist civilians who were living in Sinhala Buddhist dominant areas. The organization of civil space by extremists was directed
against the LTTE and not against Tamil residents in the South. The best example in this regard is ultra-Sinhala Buddhist nationalist party, Jathika Hela Urumaya’s march to Mavilaru in 2006.

The positive trend in this period in terms of youth radicalization was JVP’s transformation as a revolutionary party to a “a formidable electoral force among the new middle class in the semi-urban fringe of Colombo” (Dewasiri 2010:75). During this period, JVP scored a massive success in electoral politics when they won 39 seats out of 225 in the 2004 parliamentary elections. From an ideological point of view, in the early 2000s JVP became “fully integrated into the Sinhala nationalist political project” (Dewasiri 2010: 84). This was the fate of many political parties during this period. Even traditional leftist parties who ideologically and practically opposed Sinhala Buddhist nationalism had to join President Rajapaksa’s nationalist campaign for their survival.

**Trends of Youth Radicalization in the Post-War Sri Lanka**

The defeat of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan state forces in 2009 brought radicalism into a new phase. From a Hegelian point of view, it can be argued that the defeat of LTTE marked the dilemma of the ‘death of the other’ for the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. However, after 2009, Sinhala Buddhist nationalism discovered its ‘other’ in the Muslim (Hemachandra 2018). The key example for this is the growing “Islamophobia” among Sinhala Buddhists. This has led to two main violent clashes where Sinhala Buddhist extremists rioted against Muslims in 2014 and 2018. A number of houses, shops and mosques were burned and 5 Muslims were killed during these two clashes.

It is common knowledge that the two main political parties in Sri Lanka, the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), both have used Sinhala Buddhist extremism

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6 http://www.island.lk/2006/09/02/news10.html
to gain and maintain power since 1948. Therefore, it was widely believed that the governments in power at the time were behind these incidents of violent extremism.

However, there is also a positive youth radicalism which is a threat to the governments and to Sinhala Buddhist extremism. Unlike in Sinhala Buddhist extremism, this positive youth radicalism does not have a center. Instead, they operate from different spaces and as a result, sometimes it affects them negatively. This radicalism uses nonviolent means, such as peaceful protests, marches and vigils, to promote democracy, human rights, free education, gender equality, environmental rights and ethnic harmony throughout Sri Lankan society.

There is no significant research on this theme. Therefore, I will use my personal experience and observations as a youth activist to analyze the present youth radicalism. According to my observations, the youth radicals who are involved in these activities fall into five groups or segments. The first segment comprises the youth groups who have split themselves away from the JVP in 2011. These JVP members formed a radical leftist party named the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) in 2012. Initially, they appeared to be more powerful than the JVP. However, they could not have the mass appeal that the JVP once enjoyed and as a result, a number of key figures in the FSP left it and started to continue their political work without any party affiliations.

The second youth group consists of the University students from Inter University Students Federation (IUSF). University students have been highly politically active for decades. They have always been aligned with leftist politics and due to that, leftist parties have made significant effort to have a stronghold in universities. However, the radical politics of JVP attracted a considerable number of university students to the JVP from its beginning, and from 1990 to 2011, JVP became the sole controlling force of the IUSF. However, the 2011 split of the JVP ended its control over the IUSF and since then FSP has been the political force behind the IUSF. The IUSF along with other political and non-political
organizations launched a successful campaign against privatization of education. They organized number of mass rallies during this period and government had to back down from what was perceived by the campaigners as its policies of privatization of education, which in turn was conceived as a threat to free education.

Another significant segment of youth is engaged in NGOs. However, similar to the Latin American experience as described by James Petras (Petras 1997), NGOs in Sri Lanka have become a mechanism to maintain the status quo in the society rather than a mechanism of creating a positive change. Yet, for radical youths who fight for universal values such as democracy, rule of law, good governance and social cohesion and have no affiliation with political parties, NGOs have been the best option to continue their activism and at the same time gain financial support for it. Though there are a number of limitations in NGO mandates on their ‘activism’, NGOs provide a space for youth radicals to work politically within the NGO framework. By this, I am not suggesting these youth radicals are ‘paid activists’. What I am implying here is that these radical youths have been clever enough to manipulate the NGO mandates and work actively on political matters. At the same time, in some instances, youth who have no prior experience in working on political and social issues radicalize through their NGO work on democracy and ethnic cohesion.

The fourth youth group is composed of young artists- a group which comprises of film and stage actors, film and drama directors and singers. They were politically inactive for the major part of this period but organized themselves extremely effectively during the latter part of 2014 against President Rajapaksa. Most of them were involved in establishing the political group titled ‘Aluth Parapura’ (New Generation) which became extremely popular among the people after the end of December 2014 due to the physical attack they suffered at the hands of a government politician while performing music in support of the opposition candidate.

The final group is social media activists. Most of the above mentioned youth are highly engaged in social media. However, there
are youth who work in the private sector, such as advertising and marketing, who are highly active on social media. Their creativity and marketing ability have used in to political action effectively on social media, especially on Facebook, to promote democratic values in the society. In the present context, both the government and the opposition are keen on their image on the Facebook. In this circumstance, it can be argued that the likely exposure of ministerial misdeeds on social media, may have contributed to the decisions of government to remove a couple of cabinet ministers in the recent past. However, it is still early to judge the power of social media due to its newness in society.

The pinnacle of the success of these groups (excluding FSP and IUSF7) can be seen in the role they played in the January 2015 election to defeat the previous President, Mahinda Rajapaksa. Since the public sphere and the mainstream media were ruled by the Rajapaksa government, these groups used Facebook as a platform to express their opinions against the government and to encourage others to vote against President Rajapaksa in the election (Hemachandra 2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to discuss how youth radicalization can be addressed in order to have a positive impact on society. As identified earlier, the biggest challenge society encounters regarding radicalism is to prevent it from being transformed into a violent movement.

As stated above, the radical is a social product. Put differently, ‘radical’ is a response to the social, political, economic and cultural issues of society. As a result, radicals play a key role in negating these negativities which is essential to the development and progress of society. As pointed out by Tucker, radicalism is not an irrational and unintellectual phenomenon. Therefore, maintaining it within

7 They did not support the common opposition candidate.
the nonviolent domain has to be a rational as well as an intellectual process. Borrowing Descarte’s famous idea that “man is a thinking being”, it can be argued that the youth radical is a thinking being as well. Therefore, with proper dialog, it would not be an impossible task to contain radicalism within nonviolent bounds.

In this regard, I strongly believe that promoting the importance of nonviolence among the Sri Lankan youth is the best method to contain radicalism within nonviolent boundaries. Since the present generation of Sri Lankan youth has lived a major part of their lives during a period of brutal war, they have seen and heard of violence daily, and this has made the occurrence of violence a normal aspect in society. Therefore, reacting to a social issue with violence has become a general practice. At the same time, the radical youth groups such as FSP and IUSF, even though they do not use violence in their political activism, their approaches to political and social issues have been violent. For instance, they have no concern about violating human rights of people when they organize their mass rallies. It is because they do not believe nonviolent practices are effective that they resort to violent approaches. This is mainly due to their dogmatism of the Marxist-Leninist approach towards politics.

Therefore, creating a discourse on nonviolent practices of Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and others is important because it shows that violence is not the only means of achieving goals. In fact, it can be argued that nonviolence is more effective in achieving social, political and economic goals. Especially, the nonviolent practices of Gandhi and King Jr. in the independence struggle of India and the civil rights movement in the USA provide good examples of how to use nonviolence to attract mass support and to achieve success in their goals. To end this essay, I would like to extract a famous quotation from Gandhi which opens up a new dimension for the Sri Lankan youth activists. “I have learnt through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so, our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world” (in Nagler 2014: 59).
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Tamil Youth Radicalization after the Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka

By Dr. Malini Balamayuran

Abstract

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), which emerged as a small guerrilla organization, gradually became the dominant non-state armed force against the Sri Lankan government in the early 1990s. To establish a separate independent state of Tamil Eelam in the North and East for the Sri Lankan Tamils, it recruited a very large number of Tamil youth into participation in a full-scale secessionist war. At the downfall of the LTTE in 2009, the LTTE ex-combatants, who had served as barriers to achieving lasting peace, have been forced to re-socialize into normal life and to re-integrate with the society in post-war Sri Lanka. In this context, this paper concentrates on how the Tamil political leadership unwittingly laid the ground work for the Tamil youth to take a radicalized stand against the government and then sheds light on the changes in the radical beliefs, perceptions and behaviour of LTTE ex-combatants in the context of post-war Sri Lanka from information garnered through interviews which reveal their horrendous experience of trauma, abuse, and change that have taken place in terms of their present and future wellbeing. This paper concludes that the ex-LTTE combatants have been fully dis-engaged in the backdrop of vulnerability, but not de-radicalized in the nine year aftermath of the comprehensive defeat of the LTTE leadership.
Keywords: de-radicalization, dis-engagement, ex-combatants

Introduction

Sri Lanka has witnessed widespread youth mobilizations that had articulated the anti-government political insurgencies since early 1970s. In the Southern part of Sri Lanka, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), consisting of Sinhala radicalized youth, staged two insurrections in 1971 and 1987-1989. In the North, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), comprised of radicalized Tamil youth, engaged itself in a secessionist war against the Sri Lankan government for nearly three decades. The studies on youth radicalization in Sri Lanka have focused on the context that had stimulated or imagined threats of socio-economic, cultural and political prejudices and discrimination. A number of studies directly or indirectly related to youth radicalization indicate that social improvements in a situation of inadequate economic and political development led to the emergence of guerrilla organizations such as the JVP and LTTE in Sri Lanka (Kearney 1977; Samaranayake, 1999; & Uyangoda 2015). Most of the studies have revealed that Sinhalese youth insurrections, which were subdued by the government of Sri Lanka, were the direct outcome of socio-economic factors rather than political ones. It is important to consider the question, what drove Tamil youth radicalization in Sri Lanka? This question has renewed relevance as post-war Sri Lanka is in the process of integrating societies in order to build a united nation. In the case of Tamil youth radicalization in the North, Brun (2008) is of the view that ‘the dissatisfaction with and a reaction to the way the state was not able or willing to cater for Tamils’ rights to education and access to employment’ was the reason (p.401), while Uyangoda (2015) presenting a useful summary of the root causes of Tamil youth insurgencies takes a different view. According to his analysis, Tamil youth insurgency is primarily political, rather than a socio-economic phenomenon (p.101). Hettige and Mayer (2002) have argued that the democratic parliamentary system in
Sri Lanka has facilitated the mobilization of politically conscious youth to play an active part in politics. This is worth noting, as Uyangoda (2015) points out, that Tamil youth radicalization was the outcome of the repeated failure of political bargaining, which was taking place since the early 1950s with regard to the place of Tamils and their relationship to Sri Lanka. In a situation of political polarization with the Sinhalese government in the early period gaining independence, the Tamil political leadership was engaged in the normal political practices of dialogue and compromise and exercised tolerance. However, the political interests and aspirations of the Tamil political leaders were not responded properly by the government. In fact, the Sri Lankan government preferred to engage in confrontational tactics to suppress the political demands of the Tamil-speaking community. This unwittingly laid the groundwork for the Tamil youth to take a radicalized stand against the Sri Lankan government leading to a full-scale secessionist war.

Radicalization: Some Conceptual Understanding

In the past, a plethora of academic research has focused extensively on the concept of ‘radicalization.’ However, it still remains without a broadly accepted definition in the field of social science. Given that scholars, governments and institutions see difficulties in reaching a consensus in defining the term ‘radicalization’. In the Action Plan to prevent radicalization, the Danish government defines it as;

A process that gradually brings individuals or groups to use violent or undemocratic methods as a tool to reaching a specific political objective, or they may seek to undermine the democratic social order or make threats or carry out demeaning harassment against groups of people based on e.g. their skin colour, sexuality or beliefs. (2009, p. 8).

This definition by the Danish government has much in
common with the definition given by the European Union, which has defined the term ‘radicalization’ as the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which move towards terrorism. However, Jackson (2016) noted that conventionally, the term ‘radical’ denotes a revolutionary who intends to change the society fundamentally through nonviolent and democratic means, or violent and undemocratic means. Accordingly, a radical can be a democrat. In any society which has an experience of radicalization, first, the people take the initiative to improve their situation through alleviating adversity. Failure in this endeavour leads to frustration, generating feelings of aggression. Then their anger towards the opponent builds up into radical and violent ideology to achieve behavioural change and political goals. Precht (2007) defines radicalization thus;

It often starts with individuals who are frustrated with their lives, society or the foreign policy of their governments. A typical pattern is that these individuals meet other like-minded people, and together they go through a series of events and phases that ultimately can result in terrorism. However, only a few end up becoming terrorists. The rest stop or drop out of the radicalisation process at different phases (p.5)

However, in contemporary societies, it has become an unshakeable notion with no room for any debate that radicalization is a bad thing as it has been connected with violent acts leading to terrorism. Radicalization, of course, is not necessarily a menace in every circumstance in society, if it is not connected to violence or terrorist acts. However, many research studies have pointed out that the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs would lead to violent attitudes or violent action. This specific and context-bound phenomenon is the product of the deliberation of a group of likeminded people. The key area of analysis in radicalization has been the activity of non-state actors who have claimed more
attention in academic research studies. However, there is a need to consider how state-actors by their action or non-action unwittingly frame settings, and opportunities for radicalization to take place. To understand the radicalization process of the Tamil youth, it is also important to consider how Tamil political leaders had offered intense interaction with them at the early stages and provided leadership to disseminate radical ideologies.

**Historical evolution of Tamil radicalization**

At the beginning, Tamil political radicalization had begun to appear with the emergence of the Tamil Congress (TC), a Tamil political party established in 1944. The Tamil leadership of Tamil Congress pressured the British government to grant equal political representation for the Tamils of Ceylon and appealed for the inclusion of various legal provisions to safeguard them from oppression in the constitution for an independent Ceylon. Yet, this was rejected by the British administration. However, the Tamil Congress maintained a close relationship with the United National Party (UNP) government, to the point of remaining silent when the Citizenship Act, discriminating against the Tamils of Indian origin, was passed in 1948. This close association of the leadership of the Tamil Congress with the Sinhalese government created a split within the party. This resulted in S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, a Jaffna Tamil, leaving the party in 1949 to establish the Federal Party (Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi in Tamil - ITAK) in 1949. The Federal Party began to demand equality of status for Tamils and also brought to light the issues related to discrimination that Tamils were facing in Ceylon. In the mid-1950s, once the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) had formed a government, it promoted Sinhala as the official language in the fields of education, employment, administration etc. and promoted Buddhism. When the Sinhala Only Act was passed in parliament in 1956, the Federal Party began to agitate on behalf of the Tamil people, confronting the government. As a party representing the interests of the Tamil
people, the Federal Party continuously criticized the Sinhalese government’s attempts to making Sri Lanka one nation without recognizing the identity of its minorities. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam campaigned for a semi-autonomous linguistic state within a federal state of Sri Lanka. In fact, he entered into agreements with two Prime Ministers, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Dudley Senanayake, in 1957 and 1965 respectively, to safeguard the linguistic and cultural identity of the Tamils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, but his proposals were never made official. Still, the Federal Party did not give up the demands for the rights of the Tamils, and were able to generate Tamil resistance to the Sinhala-Only Act and the government negligence over the recognition of Tamils’ equal rights.

Within the Tamil leadership, at first, V. Navaratnam, a Member of Parliament from Federal Party, had formed the “Thamizhar Suyaatchik Kazhagham (Tamil Self - Rule Party), breaking away from the Federal Party. He took an extreme stand proposing a Tamil state /self- rule as a replacement of federalism. In the 1970 Parliamentary elections, Navaratnam’s party campaigned for Tamil self-rule while the Federal Party campaigned against it and advocated a federal solution. Navaratnam’s party lost the 1970 election and the Federal Party won 13 seats. Upon electoral victory, the United Front (coalition of Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Lanka Sama Samaja Party and Community Party) facilitated a new constitution- making process with the aim of establishing a fully sovereign republic. During the constitution-making process, the Federal Party kept demanding a genuine power-sharing mechanism to address the grievances of the Sri Lankan Tamils, yet it was ignored and rejected by the government of Sri Lanka. Since then, the Federal Party gradually began to change its agenda in the early 1970s. As a first step, the Federal Party joined other Tamil groups to establish the Tamil United Front (TUF) in 1972. However, the TUF was not able to make its case attentively heard in Parliament. Therefore, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam decided to resign his seat in 1974. This was seen by many Sri Lankan Tamils as proof of the impossibility of relying on democratic processes to address Tamil
grievances. By the mid-1970s, the most prominent Tamil political leaders had become disillusioned and veered to a radical stance. In fact for the first time, the Federal Party began to campaign for an independent state, i.e. a ‘Tamil Eelam’ for Tamils as they failed to achieve the political solutions that they had been agitating for earlier and the party had gradually begun to lose its significance among Tamil people. This political move created conditions for increase in hostility between the Tamil people and the government, while S.J.V. Chelvanayakam’s demands for an independent state provided a broad platform for the emergence of Tamil youth organizations in the Northern Province. The TUF needed support to execute their political protests against the Sri Lankan government and engaged the services of a few Tamil youth organizations, such as the Tamil Student Federation and the Tamil Youth Federation, who conducted large scale protests against the Sri Lankan government.

These circumstances led to the Tamil youth uniting as a group, giving themselves a common platform in the mid-1970s. The TUF held its first convention on 14 May 1976, where the ‘Vaddukoddai Resolution’ was adopted demanding the establishment of a separate state - Tamil Eelam - for Sri Lankan Tamils. Shortly afterwards, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) an Indian Tamil political party, left the coalition, since it believed that this demand was not going to be beneficial for the Indian Tamils. As a result of this, in 1976 the TUF renamed itself the ‘Tamil United Liberation Front’ (TULF). With the demise of S.J.V. Chelvanayagam in 1977, the leadership of the TULF went to the hands of A. Amirthalingam, who preferred the democratic path rather than an armed struggle to obtain Tamil rights in Sri Lanka. The TULF contested with the election manifesto reflecting the Vaddukoddai Resolution of 1976 succeeding in all 14 constituencies in the Northern Province and to winning 4 seats out of 11 in the Eastern Province. This showed that the Tamils had approved the TULF. With a total of 18 seats, the TULF became the main opposition party to the UNP government (which had 139 of the total 168 seats) in Parliament. The Tamil youth wanted the TULF members to resign from Parliament, as S.J.V. had done in
1974, and demanded their support to carry out their armed struggle against the government. However, the TULF members chose to remain as the opposition party in Parliament, prompting the Tamil youth [made up of organizations such as Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS)] to unite as a group in the early 1980s in order to carry out small scale acts of violence against the Sri Lankan government. This divide between the actors meant that one campaigned for a separate state through political channels, and the other fought against ‘the armed forces and the police using hit-and-run warfare’ (Gunaratna, quoted in Brun & Hear 2011). By the mid-1980s, as an organized armed group, the LTTE had successfully overpowered other militant youth groups and wiped them out using terror tactics (Saikia & Stepanova 2009).

Furthermore, the events which had occurred in the early 1980s had stimulated the Sri Lankan Tamil youth to stay in line to resist the Sinhalese dominated government. The UNP government ‘sought to crush the youth movement by getting the Parliament to enact the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act on 29 July 1979’ (Wilson 2000, p.124). Under the Terrorism Prevention Act, Tamil youth were arrested and detained by the Sri Lankan security on the slightest excuse. Two years later in May 1981, the Jaffna Public Library, home to rare historical documents and manuscripts, was burnt down allegedly by some members of the government security forces, as an act of reprisal. Again in July 1983, as reprisal against the killing of 13 government army personnel in an ambush in Jaffna, there occurred widespread riots in the south Sri Lanka, aimed at Tamil citizens, conducted by unruly gangs of the majority community. There were rumours that even some personages of the government were involved. For the Tamil population worldwide, these events, in a period that came to be known as ‘Black July’, proved to be a horrendous experience making up of grossly inhuman acts. The 1983 riots acted as a catalyst in convincing the Tamil majority living in the Northern and Eastern provinces
to agree and accept the LTTE and to stimulate strong sentiments against what was seen and felt as Sinhalese oppression.

The LTTE until 2009

Gradually, the LTTE developed into a dominant armed force entering into a full-scale secessionist war against the government in the early 1990s. The Eelam War II (1990) and III (1995) in the North and East had accelerated the extensive recruitment efforts of the LTTE. The LTTE established key institutions in Vanni and set up their *de facto* regime in the Vanni area with the support of local Tamils and the diaspora (Brun & Hear 2011). The ability of the LTTE to manage the diasporic community, which contributed financially, allowed it to challenge the Sri Lankan forces in the North and East. In the early 2000s, the diasporic community was also pressured by their host governments, due to the climate of opinion arising from global terrorist attacks (September 11 attacks by the Islamic terrorist group, al-Qaeda in the United States), and many western countries began to ban the LTTE. As a result, the LTTE was forced to show the democratic side of their claim for a separate state. This led to the formation of the Tamil National Alliance. In 2001, prior to the Sri Lankan Parliamentary election in December, the Tamils National Alliance (TNA) was established by Tamil parties. The old TULF was at its core. The All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), and Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation (EPRLF) were also in the alliance. The ITAK was replaced, after a few members under the leadership of Anandasangaree left the TNA, as it took a pro-LTTE stance. The newly formed TNA prepared a manifesto, demanding self-determination for Tamils and addressing the Tamil national question. There are different accounts as to how exactly

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8 De facto regime covered most of the areas in North East. LTTE had controlled over 80% of land in the North East before 2006.
9 The LTTE has been banned by 30 countries including the USA, India, Canada and all EU members.
the TNA was established, with Sinhalese politicians regarding it as consisting of delegates of the LTTE political wing fighting for an independent state. The leaders of the Tamil parties, however, stated that they decided to unite as a group, and that the LTTE invited them to discuss with it their interests in establishing a separate state for Tamils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Whatever the reality, after the 2001 elections, the TNA mainly voiced the demands of the LTTE and their Parliament members even lit an oil lamp in the Parliament building on the LTTE’s Heroes’ Day as an act of commemoration\(^{10}\).

The situation remained unchanged until the peace talks in 2002 (facilitated by Norway) led to the cessation of military confrontation between the LTTE and the government forces, in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. On 22\(^{nd}\) February 2002 a ceasefire agreement was signed between the LTTE and the government, ending 20 years of conflict and negotiations for a political solution based on devolution of power began. Negotiations in this peace process were held in many countries, and were attended by LTTE delegates and representatives of the government. At one point, it was reported that the government and the LTTE delegates finally agreed to a settlement within a devolved structure of government (claimed by some to be a federal structure) aimed to solve the ethnic conflict. However this happened apparently without the approval of the LTTE leadership. As a result, the peace process came to a standstill without any success, since the LTTE did not consider there to be any solution other than a separate state for the Tamils. Following the break-up of the peace process, in 2004 Colonel Karuna (one of Prabhakaran’s right hand men and a leader for the Eastern Province of the LTTE), left the LTTE, questioning the claim of the LTTE to be the sole representative of Tamils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Karuna’s break-away from

the LTTE challenged its Northern leadership and the reasons for this split are still subject to different interpretation. After this split, the LTTE became two separate groups, with the Northern (main) part needing more support to tackle both the Karuna faction and the government military. With the break-up of the Karuna faction, the LTTE lost thousands of cadres due to the former’s desertion and its firm grip on the East with the biggest intelligence leak in its history (Sørbø et al. 2011, p.50). As a result of its losses, the LTTE began forced conscriptions in the Vanni, a move which was resented by the Tamil people.

The presidential election of 2005 dashed any hopes for peace when the LTTE announced a boycott of the election by the Tamils. This led to the Sinhala nationalist candidate, Mahinda Rajapaksha, scoring a narrow win without the Tamil vote of the Northern and Eastern Provinces being registered at the polling booth (due to the boycott). Once Mahinda Rajapaksha came to power as President, he resumed military operations against the LTTE. The LTTE increased their guerrilla attacks throughout the country. The LTTE faced a further challenge when President, Mahinda Rajapaksa began what came to be known as Eelam War IV, commencing with the forcible re-opening of an irrigation facility closed by the LTTE. The government forces eventually captured the entire Eastern Province in July 2007. Again, beginning in January 2008 the government launched a large scale military attack against the LTTE in the Northern Province, in particular in the Vanni, the heartland of the LTTE. By January 2009, the Sri Lankan military forces had taken control of Kilinochchi, which had been the administrative capital of the LTTE since 1999, and the heavy fighting between January and May 2009 (to seize the rest of Vanni) ended when the Sri Lankan government army captured Mullaitivu.

**Battlefield to civilian life**

The recently concluded armed conflict was triggered and closely associated with the Tamil youth who had chosen violence as
their only option for correcting social inequalities and deprivation attributed to a fundamental political issue. Now it has been nine years since the war came to an end, many LTTE ex-combatants have been socialized after rehabilitation. At this juncture, the issues of ex-LTTE combatants remain unresolved to some degree. The problem remains regarding what to do with the large number of former LTTE members, another contentious issue to which the Sri Lankan government still has to attend. As of June 2014, the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation, Ministry of Prisons Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religions, has rehabilitated 11,952 individuals who had surrendered or been captured as LTTE members at the end of the war. These rehabilitated individuals were classified as children, adult male and adult female cadres\(^\text{11}\). Male cadres are recorded as 9,687 and female cadres as 2,265. Another category of ex-combatants could be named as non-rehabilitated ex-combatants who have not undergone the rehabilitation programme and have been thus far excluded from any benefits available to rehabilitated ex-combatants. To understand how ex-combatants perceive their return from the battlefield to civilian life, in-depth face to face interviews were chosen as the main research method for this study. When ex-combatants for in-depth interviews were approached, they expressed a lack of interest or reluctance to participate. After trust was established through networks, friends and others, they eventually participated. This makes one wonder whether the ex-combatants are staying free after the war ended and what it would mean to be free?

After 2009, individuals and communities have emerged from conflict to peace. For the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE ex-combatants have returned to lead normal lives at the end of the war. Ex-combatants in general share similar concerns that impact their everyday lives in the post-war setting. Personal interviews with many ex-LTTE members have revealed that security is still

\(^\text{11}\) Children ex-combatants were provided opportunities to continue their studies. The details of all rehabilitated ex-combatants are available in the government departments.
a prime concern for many cadres who live in heavily militarized areas even after the war ended. Many female ex-combatants showed hesitation to discuss their past experiences with the LTTE and to express their opinion on the current political trends of the country. The government says that these areas where they live have been heavily militarized for security reasons and to provide humanitarian assistance to the Tamil people who were victimized by the armed conflict. One ex-combatant underwent rehabilitation in the military-run detention camp for a year and upon his release, he sat for the Advanced Level (A/L) Examination, and entered the university shared his feeling on the current security situation of his area thus; ‘as I passed the A/L examination in 2012, I got the opportunity to leave my village for furthering my tertiary studies at a state university in Sri Lanka. Once I enrolled there, the university identity card, given to me for four years, kept me safe for years. When I go for vacation, military personnel used to come to my home with inquiries. Ex-fighters, staying at home with no higher education, have been experiencing everyday harassment in different ways as they continue to live there’. According to the responses of ex-combatants, it appears that the Sri Lankan government seeks to keep a close eye on the behavior of ex-combatants. When something goes wrong, ex-combatants become the first and easy targets and this continues to unsettle former LTTE cadres both female and male.

Furthermore, after the defeat of the LTTE, the ex-combatants began to experience economic and social disempowerment. This has led them to become social outcasts, rejected by individuals and their own people in their own society. An ex-combatant, married and now a father of two children after his rehabilitation worried ‘my head has been wounded by piece shrapnel in the final battle in Mullativu. Still the small piece of shell is in my head. If it is removed, I will die, the doctors have advised me so. Therefore with these physical ailments, I do ‘Coolie’ work for my family’. Another combatant stated that ‘when I was in the LTTE, sometimes I slept only two hours, but never felt tired. After being injected with a vaccine at a military-run rehabilitation centre, I feel tired. When working long hours I simply feel faint. I have no energy’. Even though the Sri Lankan government rejects the allegations of harmful injections
being given to ex-combatants, still such rumours that can adversely affect the mental and social stability of ex-combatants who have been reintegrated into the society do circulate.

More importantly, many young ex-fighters in good physical condition face challenges with inadequate access to livelihood resources. A 24 year old ex-fighter stated ‘if we have good jobs, there is a possibility for us to return to our normal life’. Another ex-combatant in Mullaitivu said that ‘we fought for the Tamil society, but today no one respects us and no one is ready to provide us with employments’. Ordinary people in their own society make use of ex-LTTE cadres for illegal economic activities. This means that ex-combatants face new forms of social exclusion. When there are inadequate livelihood opportunities, the LTTE ex-combatants are forced to engage in illegal economic activities. A former member of the LTTE intelligence wing said ‘I fought for the Tamil society for nine years. I felt / feel more proud of taking part in such a freedom fighting. Now my relatives are scared to talk to me as I am an ex-fighter. Sometimes, people ask me to do illegal work such as cutting trees and illegally transporting sand from one area to another. This makes me so sad’. After returning from military-run camps, a large number of LTTE ex-combatants view themselves as fighting another war against challenges such as lack of steady, decently paid employment opportunities, inadequate vocational training, economic dependence, the failure of the government and their community to acknowledge their sufferings, and issues in rebuilding the societal relationships and integration into post-conflict society.

Female ex-combatants have reported that they experience a range of economic, social, physical and psychological vulnerabilities in post-war Sri Lanka. Some female ex-LTTE members stated that the LTTE had made them stronger, braver and less naïve. However, the lack of opportunities in the post-war setting limits the potential for women’s empowerment. As Saavedra and Saroor (2017) pointed correctly lack of employment opportunities, the lack of material reparation from the government, physical ailments, and the loss of assets have made women more vulnerable. After the war, a large number of women have been forced to become breadwinners of
the family, thus it has changed the female’s positions permanently in the family. Many of them have been forced to choose traditional role of motherhood in order to stay safe from harassment and discrimination in private and public spheres. Not all female combatants choose to become mothers, some did not want to talk about their marriages and stated they won’t marry as they feel they won’t have good future. When it comes to foreign marriage proposals, it appears to be difficult for female ex-combatants to go through the procedures of Sri Lankan immigration authorities as both Immigration and Security authorities are believed to have been advised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on how to deal with ex-combatants. In a way, the ex-combatants are being forced to marry within their society. Many female ex-combatants said that it is possible to marry a person within their district, but when it comes to persons outside the district, the groom’s parents will not allow him to marry a bride with a background of having been rehabilitated in military-run camps.

The previous exposure to battle has resulted in increased prevalence of physical injuries and mental illness in the post-conflict settings. Serious physical injuries and emotionally traumatic events appear relatively common among the ex-combatants. Many youth in the war-affected areas still experience the bitter aftermath, suffering their trauma silently. Unlike physical injuries, mental anomalies remain invisible to society, but affect thoughts, mood and behaviour. During the interviews, at the beginning, an ex-combatant was very quiet and reluctant to speak to me, but gradually he opened up and said ‘when I am alone, my mind is afraid of violent combat memories of the past. Sometimes, I feel like beating up everyone’. Unless treated, these conditions will have over-arching and negative results for the ex-combatant and can last for years. Another ex-combatant who was still single and did not want to marry said that ‘at night I hear my friends’ crying. It is like a flashback or repeated distressing memories of the past battle experience. Now I want to be alone, not to be in a group’. In addition to the above, ex-combatants continue to experience poor governance, and disintegration of families and
communities. Drawing from the situation depicted above, one can concluded that even after nine years of the end of the armed conflict, they have been struggling to fit into the civilian life that other individuals enjoy in post-war Sri Lanka. Now we may proceed to explore whether LTTE ex-combatants have been de-radicalized or disengaged in the post-war settings.

The term ‘de-radicalization’ refers to one of the major measures taken in counter-terrorism action (Horgan, 2009; Gunaratna & Mohamed 2015; Koehler 2016). Still, relatively little attention has been paid to the different aspects of the process of de-radicalization. In the process of de-radicalization, the term disengagement is often discussed and sometimes, the two are used interchangeably. However, ‘de-radicalization’ and ‘disengagement’ substantially differ from each other in their meaning and carry distinct conceptual and terminological understandings. Horgan (2009) defines de-radicalization as ‘[t]he social and psychological process whereby an individual’s commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity’. Accordingly, de-radicalization is a cognitive shift in the way of people’s thoughts rejecting the ideology that they had accepted and supported at one time (Ashour 2008; Koehler & Horgan, 2016). Thus, de-radicalization is an ideological transformation in which people genuinely alter motivation, ideology, and attitudes pertaining to violence.

Disengagement refers to the change in behaviour (not engaging in violence and leaving the radical group) without giving up their radical beliefs and attitudes (Koehler 2016). This means, that disengagement is behavioural-based and individuals abandon violence and are no longer involved with their former militant group. However, disengagement does not necessarily alter or result in the renouncing of his/her ideology (Ashour, 2008). According to Horgan (2009), the disengaged terrorist may not necessarily be de-radicalised at all. Definitely, there will be physical disengagement from violent activity with no major changes or reduction in
ideological support. Therefore, it is worthwhile to highlight that disengagement is not sufficient to guarantee de-radicalization, but it can often precede de-radicalization (Ashour, 2008; Koehler & Horgan, 2016). Furthermore, Horgan (2009) argues that disengagement may be either broadly voluntary or involuntary, taking place against a backdrop of vulnerability, catalyzed often by stress, crisis and trauma. The situations of vulnerability in post-war Sri Lanka inform whether Tamil ex-combatants have been de-radicalized or disengaged.

Today’s LTTE ex-combatants in the North and East were the major actors in the battle of the last phase of armed conflict. Generally, armed groups do not rely on a single recruitment method changing their approach according to circumstances. After the breakaway of Karuna, the LTTE had begun to recruit thousands of Tamil youth and child soldiers threatening the families in the North to provide their sons and daughters for military service. Some, however, willingly joined the LTTE. From the interviews it was revealed that there were two kinds of members in LTTE. The members who joined voluntarily, prior to 2005, are called Old Tigers and the members, who were recruited by force, after 2005, are New Tigers. The LTTE members speak from different experience and different perspectives. The young ex-combatants interviewed for this study revealed the different experiences with regard to the process of conscription by the LTTE. Especially, the child soldiers who have now become youth have shared heart-breaking, but true stories revealing the enormous complexities of their experience and situations in the past, vis-à-vis the LTTE. A twenty-six year old female ex-combatant shared her first-hand testimony of how children were recruited by the LTTE;

When I was 16, one day a white van came to our street and stopped in front of my house. The LTTE members came in and said they need a member of my family. Then my grandmother (I do not have my mother nor my father) replied that she has three grandchildren and that already
the second child (17-year old) has been sent. By that time, just I was there, but they caught me and put me into their vehicle and took me away.

A male-ex-combatant stated his experience of the way he joined the LTTE;

I was taken away by the LTTE at the age of 17. A few days later I escaped the camp. To catch me again, the LTTE cadres came to my house. Once I saw them, I began to run through barbed wire which severely hurt my back, but I did not stop running. However, the LTTE members caught and brought me to the camp. At the camp, I was beaten thoroughly in front of other soldiers as a warning. Then I had to re-join the LTTE with no options. Thereafter my head was shaved preventing me from escaping. [If someone was found with a shaved head it meant they are the people who tried to escape from the LTTE]. What I finally decided was not to escape, but I wanted to die soon. So I joined the Black Tigers.

Another female ex-combatant who was recruited by force at the age of 16 asked not to be identified out of fear of repercussions. She said;

'I was given only 6 days of coaching on the operation of loading and aiming rifles. On the seventh day, 10 girls like me were taken in a vehicle to relieve a few male LTTE cadres who were trapped by government military forces. This happened in the last days prior to the end of the war. Since I was new, I did not know what to do there. Shortly after I reached the place, I was peppered with shrapnel. A piece had injured my head. I lost consciousness and I do not know how I was taken to hospital. One week later, I was taken to medics, run by the LTTE. Exactly a week
after, seven girls including me were taken to the battlefield again. Shortly after we arrived there, we understood that government forces had trapped us. Then we all decided to bite the cyanide capsule, but I could not die due to having an expired cyanide capsule.

The views obtained from the ex-combatants (former child soldiers) indicate that they did not like the manner in which LTTE operated in the later part of the armed conflict. Even then, they disclosed their satisfaction under the LTTE administration. When it comes to the members, who joined the LTTE voluntarily as cadres before 2005, they have stronger affiliations with the LTTE. The Old Tigers also recognize the later stage of the LTTE as horrific, however they feel continued adherence to the cause for which they fought. One such former LTTE member who spent seven years fighting and had been detained for two years in the military-run detention camp and is now married to a woman who had also been an LTTE member stated

You see, generally people do not forget a president who rules a country for nearly 5-6 years. How can we forget a leader who shared our worries and fought for us? I am sure if the resting place of the great LTTE heroes (Thuliyum illam) opened up, everyone would go and light lamps for them. If we are given more freedom, you would see our leader’s photo in the living rooms of our houses.

In fact, some ex-combatants preferred to be identified as ex-combatant not as Sri Lankan citizens. Many ex-combatants have never voted in Sri Lankan elections as they do not believe in democratic practices. One ex-combatant stated ‘I have never voted and I do not know, how often elections are held in Sri Lanka?’ For him, the Sri Lankan elections are largely meaningless. Most of the interviews with ex-combatants in Vanni revealed that the leader of the LTTE, Prabakharan, was seen as the embodiment of the spirit of Tamil-
ness. According to ex-combatants, the LTTE had abolished the caste system, gender differences, and regional differences from the Tamil society. In fact, they saw the LTTE as a government separate from the Sri Lankan government. Drawing from the above, the disengagement among the ex-combatants has taken place in this backdrop of vulnerability. An ideological change has not taken place even though the LTTE has been destroyed. They still have not renounced the ideology instilled by the LTTE. They are no longer members of the LTTE as it has been destroyed and as they are no longer with the LTTE, but they have abandoned the culture of violence.

Conclusion

The Tamil National Alliance has been ‘The party’ in the Tamil nationalist political sphere, although it had renounced its strong demands for a separate homeland for Tamils after the defeat of LTTE. Yet, at the very recent local government elections in February 2018, the victory of Tamil National People’s Front (TNPF) and the Eelam People’s Democratic Party (EPDP) claiming nearly 200 seats reveals a surprising degree of instability of the TNA position in the Tamil politics. The gradual loss of the TNA’s monopoly in Tamil politics has been partly attributed to the actions of Wigneswaran, the former Chief Minister, Northern Provincial Council. His political moves have taken a U-turn leading to a hard-line faction. Wigneswaran’s demands for settling the Tamil question look quite similar to that of the Tamil nationalist political leaders of Sri Lanka of the 1970s. The formation of Wigneswaran’s *Tamil People’s Council* (Tamil Makkal Paaravai) as a non-political organization in 2015 and then a new political party formation of *Tamil People’s Front* (Tamil Makkal Kootani - TMK) in 2018 direct the way for a renewed beginning of Tamil nationalism. Yet, it seems that this is only new wine in old bottles. The founding members of Tamil People’s Council of 2015 such as TNPF have not attended the new political party formation event of Wigneswaran. Again, the Eelam Tamil
Self Rule Organization, the second new political party of Ananthi Sasitharan, a Wigneswaran follower in the Northern Provincial Council has further weakened the Wigneswaran’s political moves. In this backdrop of political adversity, Mullivaikal Remembrance Day was organized by the students of Jaffna University with no political favour. Again the operation of Tamil youth gangs, between the ages of 18-25, has terrified the Tamils, committing drug-related crimes, house robberies, road assaults and other types of illegal business in the heavily-militarized area with 24/7 close monitoring. The current situation in the north may convey to the Tamil youth the sense of frustration which can lead to tragic results.

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Challenges in Countering Radicalization: Sri Lankan Youth Experience

By Vidura Prabath Munasinghe

Introduction

The term radical has a long history which can be traced up to the Enlightenment\(^\text{12}\). According to Emmanuel Kant the motto of the Enlightenment was to 'have the courage to use your own understanding'\(^\text{13}\). Reason, scientific knowledge, progress, fraternity and secularism were seen as the values of modern society\(^\text{14}\). All the radical movements in this era (irrespective of their right or leftist political stances) were known for defending these modern values.

But in today's context the term 'radical' has gained a different connotation. Today we can witness a clear distinction between the left and right-wing radical movements in terms of their approaches towards modern values, such as reason, scientific knowledge, progress, fraternity and secularism. In the contemporary world the radical right is an 'exclusionary populism' which advocates a democracy based on a homogeneous community which grants privileges only to the long-standing citizens of the land and demands

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\(^{12}\) Enlightenment is a philosophical movement which dominated throughout the 18th century in Europe.


to make the others deprived from social benefits\textsuperscript{15}. Accordingly, all the groups who oscillate among the ideas of racism, xenophobia, and ultra-nationalism are seen as right-wing extremists\textsuperscript{16}. Compared to the exclusionist populist nature of the right-wing political groups, inclusion has always been the key characteristic of radical left-wing politics. As their main objective is to challenge the capitalist system and class society and oppose neo-liberalism, they incorporate all the people including all minorities\textsuperscript{17}. As a result, they have supported the struggles which defend animal rights, protest against shale gas drilling and advancing other environmental causes, as well as seek to stop the deportation of immigrants\textsuperscript{18}. What we are witnessing today is a downfall of the radical left's inclusionary politics in the face of the rising wave of the exclusionary populist radical right\textsuperscript{19}. Therefore, today's popular idea of radicalism does not associate with the Enlightenment ethos anymore. What is often seen today as radicalism are the exclusionist right-wing ideas and right-wing politics which violently attack the 'other' identities. Due to this reason the term 'radical' is most often associated with violence and terrorism in the contemporary world\textsuperscript{20}.

In Europe, the Madrid bombing of 2004 and the London bombing of 2005 were the events which initiated conceptualizing this new form of radicalism in terms of violence and terrorism\textsuperscript{21}.

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while the USA had started this process in their propaganda for 'war on terror' which they started in the post 9/11 period. According to Peter Neumann, one of the founders of the new radicalization debate, in the highly charged atmosphere following the September 11 attacks, it was through the notion of radicalization that a discussion about the political, economic, social and psychological forces that underpin terrorism and political violence became possible again. Peter Neumann presents three characteristics of this new radicalization.

01. It is a defense against an existential threat. That means that a person feels that his ethnic/religious community is under serious threat which will ultimately wipe out that identity from the planet.

02. It is about an issue of identity or belonging. That is the feeling that people do not belong in the society they live in. It makes a person to perceive himself/herself using just one marker of identity and judge all the others according to that identity marker.

03. It uses close networks. People join radical groups or join in action in certain situations as clusters of people who are known to each other for a long time through their networks.

Thus it is important to note that the present meaning of 'Radicalization' is a newly invented one in the face of the right wing popular exclusionist politics which emerged in the last two decades. This essay tries to explore the groups/movements of this nature that emerged during the last two decades in Sri Lanka and examines three efforts to develop movements to counter these movements.

22 Ibid. 1
Radicalization in the Sri Lankan context

Groups or movements which could be identified in terms of Neumann’s characteristics of radicalization could be witnessed since the late 1990s although the more prominent and active movements emerged after 2005. Far-right exclusionist popular sentiments were clearly visible in the propaganda of the organizations such as National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT) and Sinhala Weera Vidahana. Although ideas of an existential threat and issues of identity or belonging were there in almost all the post independent Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist organizations including Mavbima Surakime Vyaparaya25, Mahajana Eksath Peramuna26, etc. operationalization of these organizations did not occur through already established cult like networks; rather they mobilized people through organized national campaigns which were designed solely for their political goals. But NMAT and Sinhala Weera Vidahana, that framed Tamil separatism and Muslim expansion as a fundamental threat to the Sinhalese27, operationalized their activism through urban and sub-urban youth networks which were not developed along with their organizational structures. When NMAT published an advertisement in the newspapers to recruit new members they asked about the already existing networks of the prospective members28. Due to this nature of the organization, their membership was mainly concentrated in certain urban and sub urban clusters where the members had already formed networks. Their activism and mobilization of membership too portrayed this characteristic as

28 Ibid.
they operated more like mobs instead of an organized membership. For example when they organized violent protests damaging the properties of the British High Commission and the US Embassy, this violent mob characteristic could be witnessed. Their protests often went out of control and when violent activities occurred in close proximity to their protests, it was obvious that their members and supporters were behind such acts. When these organizations protested against a show in which the famous Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan performed, a grenade was thrown at the crowd killing two persons and injuring several others.

"These organizations mostly intervened in matters that many mainstream organizations found uncomfortable to handle. They were capable of handling them because there seemed to be no boundary that these organizations could not cross. They were not only aggressive in their character, but also had the willingness to take up any issue which would be perceived to be important for Sinhala-Buddhist interests."

Later these organizations formed a political party named Sihala Urumaya (SU) and still later it was transformed into Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) in order to contest the elections. Even in their election results it was clear that they had an urban and sub urban basis which could be traced back to their networks which mobilized their mob attacks. After the LTTE closed the Mavilaru anicut (dam) it was the JHU that demanded, by organizing a march to the controversial site, that the government attack the LTTE and start the war. It marked the beginning of the war which ended in 2009. Throughout

31 In the 2000 October General Election Sinhala Urumaya was able to get 9.4%, 5% and 4.98% votes from Kotte, Panadura and Colombo respectively although they got only 1.4% total votes island wide.
this period, Sinhala-Buddhist extremist cults, articulated by the JHU, aligned with the government's war propaganda and campaigned for war. Political parties such as the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Jathika Nidahas Peramuna (JNP) also aligned with these populist right wing radicals during the war propaganda and were able to exert an immense influence on the Sri Lankan masses.

After the end of the war, the radical factions that aligned with national level political parties such as JHU, JVP and JNP moved away and formed new fronts, as political parties always have broader interests in their Parliamentary power politics. It is in this context we could witness the rise of organizations such as Bodu Bala Sena (BBS-Buddhist Army)\(^{33}\), Sihala Ravaya (Voice of Sinhalese), Mahasohon Balakaya (Mahasohon-a local devil- brigade)\(^{34}\), Sinhale Jathika Balamulhuwa and Ravana Balaya (Ravana's Power-Ravana,a mythical king). Although these organizations adopted violent mob like mobilization, they continue to keep close connections with the national level political parties such as JHU, JNP and the Joint Opposition (JO)\(^{35}\). All these political parties may disown connections with these violent Sinhala-Buddhist radical groups, yet there are many instances in which connections between them were revealed\(^{36}\). As Nirmal Devasiri has described, it is best to understand that these political parties are eager to 'reap the political

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33 BoduBalaSena is accused of mobilizing people and promoting hate speech which ultimately led to attacks on Muslims in Aluthgama and Dharaga Town in 2014 June killing several Muslims and destroying hundreds of properties that belonged to Muslims.

34 Mahasohon Balakaya is accused of mobilizing people in attacks which occurred in the Kandy District in March 2018 killing one Muslim and destroying properties.

35 Joint Opposition (JO) consist of the majority of the Parliamentarians of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) who have decided not to support the UNP (United National Party) and UPFA coalition government. They are led by the former President Mahinda Rajapakse who lost the Presidential Election in 2015.

harvest from the work of these organizations.\textsuperscript{37}.

**Countering Sinhala-Buddhist radicalization**

In order to get an empirical understanding about the challenges faced by the groups who challenge the radical groups discussed above, the author would like to examine three case studies on such attempts with which he himself was associated with during the 2014-18 period.

### 01 Collective for Human Space

Collective for Human Space was the first campaign launched against the Sinhala-Buddhist extremism after the end of the war. Throughout the post independent period and especially in the war propaganda, radical Sinhala-Buddhist groups campaigned against Tamils saying they pose an existential threat to the Sinhala-Buddhists and demanded to build a Sinhala-Buddhist nation ignoring Tamil aspirations. But after the end of the war it was Muslims who became subject to the wroth of these extremist groups. By mid-2014 these anti-Muslim sentiments came to their peak with the intense propaganda of BBS and their agitations. Connections between the factions of the then government and the BBS could be seen clearly, and the BBS operated freely with the state patronage.\textsuperscript{38} The Collective for Human Space was organized in this context by a group of Sinhalese young men and women. Their initial gathering had about 100 attendees. Some of them represented organizations and some took part in their individual capacity. Almost all these organizations agreed to support the cause of promoting ethnic/religious harmony and strategically address the anti-Muslim propaganda of BBS, but were unwilling to become part of the main organizing body. Accordingly, the Collective for

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, 38.

Human Space could not have prominent civil society activists in their organizational body and it was a group of young people who had a history of different engagements with diverse leftist groups that finally comprised this organisation. Within a couple of weeks of its initiation this minimally experienced and relatively minimally organized group had to respond to the Aluthgama attack carried out by the BBS mobs. However surprisingly enough they were able to mobilize all the resources and manpower available to them in this highly tense situation and launch a successful poster campaign in Colombo and its suburbs. They went on to organize a large scale rally with the participation of civil society activists, artists, trade union leaders, etc. It was the first such mobilization of anti-racist fractions of society during the post war period.

After this initial success and receiving of public attention, the Collective for Human Space wanted to form a wider front against the Sinhala-Buddhist radicals and started negotiating with different organizations and groups. Most of the people who ideologically agreed with them did not openly extend their support for a long term agenda as they felt it was too dangerous to become subject to the wrath of the government which seemed to be supporting the BBS. Accordingly, while the BBS expanded their networks locally and internationally the Collective for Human Space could not expand and successfully counter the violent extremist threat. So the organizers had to face the danger of state oppression alone. They were also high risk of being attacked by extremists. As they were not popular public figures or a known organization there was a risk of not getting due legal protection in terms of investigations and legal actions if they were attacked. After the initial actions against the violence and the racism which were embedded in the Aluthgama attack, they had no clarity on the future direction of their organization. Although ideologically they could easily agree on broad stances, when it came to working as a group they were

unsuccessful in coping with diverse ideas. They also had to deal with different agendas of different members. Most of the members of the Collective got discouraged and gradually made themselves distant from the activities of the organization in this context. In addition, they had to depend on their personal networks for funding for their activities which was not a practical proposition in the long run. Finally, after several months of its initiation, the Collective for Human Space became non-existent.

01 Aluth Parapura (New Generation)

*Aluth Parapura* consisted of a group of young artists, academics and activists who got together to support the Presidential election campaign of the Maithripala Sirisena in 2015 with the intention of overthrowing the Rajapakse government in late 2014. After the election win, the *Aluth Parapura* was able get the government’s support for their activities. For the first time in 2015 the new government refrained from organizing Victory Day celebrations on 19th May and *Aluth Parapura* organized an event with the title 'Solidarity day' to commemorate all the people who lost their lives in the civil war. It became really controversial as Sinhala-Buddhist extremists labeled it as an action of betrayal. *Aluth Parapura* organized an event named 'No More July' on the date on which the riots in which hundreds of Tamils were massacred 32 years ago in 1983. They organized a massive Valentine's Day celebration titled 'Red-Festival of Love' which promoted the universal nature of love irrespective of ethnicity, class, creed, caste or any other difference. These activities were clearly challenging the prevailing radical extremist sentiments and they were able to gain considerable popularity.

When organizing these events, they enjoyed the facility of state patronage, and there was no risk of state oppression whatsoever. But the threats from the Sinhala-Buddhist extremists were at its highest, especially in the social media. However if any attack was carried out against them they were confident that they could get
protection from the law enforcement authorities and have a speedy investigation process through their links with the government. Due to their close links with the government they were able to find sponsors for their activities and the government’s permission to use the venues at the city centers. However within a very short period of time, the conditions changed. *Aluth Parapura* felt that the government was not living up to its promises and decided to support a leftist party of the opposition, the JVP, in the 2015 General Election and gradually made themselves distant from the government. As a result, they lost the support of the government.40

As Social Media played a significant role in the 2015 Presidential Election, all the political organizations had made social media an important site for their social engagement. *Aluth Parapura* did the same. But they had to face an unprecedented problem. Their Facebook account was hacked and the people who hacked it started to maintain the page in a similar manner similar to the one in which *Aluth Parapura* would have done it. *Aluth Parapura* complained to the Crime Investigation Department (CID) and investigations proceeded progressively for a few months, but suddenly they were halted without any explanation. In addition, there were a number of fake Facebook accounts operating in the name of *Aluth Parapura* with the intention of making them unpopular or of ridiculing them.41

After losing government support and its social media platform, they are now at the risk of being targeted by extremist attacks with no support of the law and order mechanisms of the country. On the other hand, they are unable to organize any notable social engagement due to funding issues. At the same time differences of opinion among the members on various contemporary issues have incapacitated them from acting as a group most of the times. Today *Aluth Parapura*’s influence has become almost non-existent.

40  Interview, April 04, 2018.
41  Interview, April 28, 2018.
03 An effort to organize a protest against the anti-Muslim attacks in the Central Province

Two days after the Mahasohon Balakaya mobs, as alleged, carried out attacks in the Central Province\footnote{After an incident in which a group of Sinhalese accused a Muslim restaurant owner of mixing contraceptive drugs in food (an accusation propagated by the Sinhala-Buddhist radical extremists for a long time against Muslims) Mahasohon Balakaya was able to initiate the spread of an island-wide anti-Muslim sentiment. As a result of this, Sinhala-Buddhist mobs led by Mahasohon Balakaya attacked Muslims and their property in the Central Province. Damage to the Muslims’ property in Digana and Theldeniya areas was severe. One person was killed while hundreds of incidents of arsons were reported.} against Muslims and their property\footnote{"Mahasohon Balakaya office raided", http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Mahasohon-Balakaya-office-raided-147219.html, accessed on August 18, 2018.} a meeting was called by a group of youth activists to discuss the action that could be taken against these Sinhala-Buddhist extremist mobs. It had a diverse participation of about 75 persons including persons from NGOs, civil society organizations, trade unions, and academia. But after a heated five-hour discussion, no one was able to make any decision on implementing any action against the violence except issuing a joint statement. The conditions were not as hostile as the Collective for Human Space had faced in 2014, but it was clear that no government support could be expected for their counter-extremist activism. They had to depend on their close networks for funding. But out of the three cases of counter-extremist initiatives I am analyzing, it was in this case that people from different ethnic and religious communities, people belonging to different classes or social strata and people from different political persuasions were represented in a gathering.

However most of the people were not prepared to see the issue in its political aspect and suggested to help the victims of violence by donating cloths and food as if it was a natural disaster. Everyone empathized with the affected, but no one was brave...
enough to take a stand publicly against the extremist evil. Rather than collective engagement with the rest of society most of them resorted to contributing to the cause privately. When it came to trade unions, they were of the view that unlike in the glory days, they were unable to mobilize their members in support of issues which were not directly related to their working conditions.

**Challenge of countering radicalization**

When we consider these three cases we see that there are several common features in terms of the challenges faced in three different circumstances.

All the groups who wanted to challenge the Sinhala-Buddhist radical extremism felt isolated and that they had no support of a wide social network to defend them, if they were physically or morally attacked. Thereby they found it very difficult to operate effectively in the public sphere without government patronage. When the government's political agenda did not facilitate the ideology of these groups they become almost inactive.

01. Due to the lack of government patronage most of the groups chose social media as their key weapon against extremist propaganda but later they realized that this instrument can go out of one's control due to hacking and other acts. Once there was a racist sticker campaign called 'Sinhala le' (Lion's blood) launched by the *Sinha Le Jathika Sanvidahanaya* and many vehicles displaying that sticker could be seen. After the attacks in the Central Province one member of the *Aluth Parapura* suggested the launching of a counter sticker campaign called 'I am not a racist'. The other agreed to the idea but they were divided upon the manner of implementation.44 The majority did not agree to the idea of launching the campaign as a mass public event with

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44 Interview, April 23, 2018.
a poster campaign and walking up to crowds in public places and explaining to people about the program and distributing stickers to vehicle owners who are willing to support the cause by displaying the stickers on their windscreen. Instead the majority was satisfied with just distributing the stickers through their closed networks and posting the photos of the stickers on their personal Facebook walls.

02. There is a trend among members of the counter-racial extremist groups to address social issues individually. Youth radicalization or spread of extremism is a social phenomenon and needs to be addressed at the social level. But most of the efforts against extremism do not portray willingness to deal with it in the public sphere. Instead many suggest actions which one can individually implement without much effort and get rid of his or her guilty conscience of not doing anything against evil.

03. The membership of these counter-radical extremist organizations does not have a clear perspective on the issues they are dealing with. In a certain discussion one of the leading figures of one the anti-extremist organizations used the popular labels that refer to different ethnic communities not knowing that those labels are clear manifestations of racism. He described Muslims as a trading community without considering the complexity of this ethnic category and that it was a stereotypical characterization that was similar to Jews being described as extra intelligent, and the French being described as philosophical, etc.\textsuperscript{45}

04. At the same time the organizations that counter extremist ideas are extremely divided among themselves upon different issues, which situation makes it impossible for them to work on a common platform against the common enemy. For example most of the trade unions were not willing to collaborate, in any circumstances, with the JVP to organize a protest against

\textsuperscript{45} Interview, May 5, 2018.
the mob attacks on Muslims which occurred in the Central Province\textsuperscript{46}. FSA (Frontline Socialist Party) organized a separate protest without joining the common protest, as the JVP took part in it. Sometimes one member of a counter-extremist organization might perceive another in the same camp as an enemy, more than he would a member of an extremist organization. No dialogue, discussion or critical engagement can be seen among the different groups in the same camp.

**Conclusion**

All the above described common features have to be understood in the light of the rise of the exclusionist right wing radical populist movements and the decline of popular radical left wing politics. While the Sinhala-Buddhist radical right gained popularity during the last two decades, the Sri Lankan leftist movement which always defended the vulnerable groups who were excluded in the dominant discourse (and incorporated them into a common struggle) lost its way and became crippled. When we examine the modern political history of Sri Lanka it was the leftist movement which displayed the most progressive activism. For example, it was A.E.Goonasinghe, the veteran trade union leader (though not generally considered a ‘leftist’ as such), and his Ceylon Labour Party that were in the forefront of the struggle for universal suffrage\textsuperscript{47}. The *Suriya Mal* Movement\textsuperscript{48} was the first political mass movement to engage with the masses openly\textsuperscript{49}. It

\textsuperscript{46} Discussion, February 25, 2018.
\textsuperscript{47} Kumari Jayawardena, "Origin of the Left Movement in Sri Lanka", in *Social Scientist Vol. 2, No. 6/7*, (New Delhi, Indian School of Social Sciences, 1974), 5.
\textsuperscript{48} Suriya Mal movement was initiated by a group of young Marxists in order to support the victims of the malaria epidemic in the 1930s under the slogan of 'Peace and Freedom'. It was an anti-imperialist move against the Remembrance Poppy propaganda of the colonial power. Later these young Marxist men and women formed Lanka Samamsamaja Party.
\textsuperscript{49} Santasilan Kadirgamar, "Landmarks in the History of the Left Movement:
was the *Samamasamaja* and the Communist Parties that took the issues of plantation workers into national politics and fought for their rights\(^50\). The Leftist movement throughout its history was able to maintain a strong anti-racist stance while both the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) depended on Sinhala-Buddhist exclusive populist sentiments to secure their vote base. It was the Beijing wing of the Lanka Communist Party (under the leadership of the veteran trade union leader Shanmugathasan) who fought against caste discrimination in Jaffna\(^51\). Almost all the labour rights recognized in different Sri Lankan legislations are results of continuous demands made by the Leftist movement. The Left parties had persons from all the ethnic and religious communities in their leadership positions due to their inclusive nature, except for the JVP, the leadership of which consisted of Sinhala Buddhists\(^52\). The Left parties were well organized and displayed massive organizing power during trade union actions and other mass mobilizations. They had a good

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51 By the time of 1960 March General Election which was held after the assassination of Prime Minister S.W.R.D.Bandarnayake, Left parties were greatly divided. In this election Left parties were able to win 23 seats (Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) -10 seats, Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) - 10 seats and and Communist Party (CP) - 3 seats). This gave them the opportunity to form a coalition government with Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLPP) and Federal Party bringing Sinhala nationalist SLFP and Tamil Federal Party together. But due to the divisions among themselves Left parties were unable to form this coalition. As a result Governor-General Oliver Goonetilleke dissolved parliament and in the next election S.W.R.D.Bandaranayake’s widowed wife Sirimavo Bandaranayake won the election crushing the United National Party (UNP) and Left parties. Santasilan Kdirgarmar, “Landmarks in the History of the Left Movement: 1935 to 1980", In *Pathways of the Left in Sri Lanka*, (Colombo, Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 2014), 18.

relationship and dialogue with other parties and were willing to join common platforms for common causes except in events like 1960 March General Election\textsuperscript{53}. The old Left movement also had a robust intellectual dialogue amongst different groups and within their own organizations. But the decline of the left after the 1970s, the crushing of the trade union movement in the aftermath of the 1980 general strike and the JVP's stance against the so called Indian intervention and their alignment with the populist right wing parties in the war propaganda, made most of this legacy to wither away\textsuperscript{54}. The 'New Left'\textsuperscript{55} lost its popularity during the last three decades, and parallel to this decline the new exclusionist Sinhala-Buddhist radical groups were able to gain popularity and dominance in the


popular political discourse.

Leftist discourse was all about incorporating all the vulnerable groups (class, caste, ethnic, religious, gender, etc.) into one force to fight against the common enemy, i.e. the capitalist class. During its hay day all the persons who challenged the Sinhala-Buddhist extremist politics always located themselves within this leftist discourse in one way or another. But after the Left lost its popularity, strength and intellectual authority, people who tried to counter extremism lost that stronghold. This crisis was worsened when right-wing politics became more and more exclusionist and championed the populist radical cause during the last two decades.

The fate of the Movement for Human Space and *Aluth Parapura* needs to be understood in this context. If the members of these organizations were attacked by the violent radical groups, there was no strong political camp they could trust or align with to demand justice. That is the very reason for the *Aluth Parapura* to depend on government's support. If there was a strong leftist movement, youths who were brave enough to form the Movement for Human Space and the *Aluth Parapura* would have located themselves in the left-wing stronghold. If that option was available to them restricting themselves to close networks may not have been needed and more and more youths would have become encouraged to counter the radicals more actively and publicly. With the decline of the left all these strengths were lost and that eventuality paved the way for the challenges presented in this essay. So far the Left which is supposed to engage in inclusive politics has not been able to produce a positive answer to the challenges posed by the popular exclusionist radical right-wing. As a result, efforts to counter extremism have not been able to gain significant success except for being platforms which let people to get rid of their guilty conscience of not doing anything in the face of violent radicalism. What happened in the above described effort to organize a protest against the anti-Muslim attacks in the Central province is a classic example of the hopelessness of the act.
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Trends in Youth Radicalization in South Asia: A Case Study of Pakistan

By Prof. Moonis Ahmar*

Abstract

The youth bulge in Pakistan is both a challenge and an opportunity because of two main reasons. First, with 60% of the population composed of the youths, it is a challenge for the state and society to empower youth with quality education, health and employment opportunities. Second, with enormous human resource in the shape of a massive youth population, it is an opportunity for Pakistan to turn around and transform the country as a progressive, welfare oriented, developed and peaceful country with the help of the youth. This paper is an attempt to analyze and examine critically the predicament of youths in Pakistan and the surge of radicalization as far as the future of the country is concerned i.e. why the radicalization of youth in Pakistan is considered a threat to human security, how the energies of youths can be channelized in a positive direction, what should be the role of the state and society in empowering the youths of Pakistan and how they can be motivated and integrated in the process of social and human development.

Introduction

Radicalization of youth is not a new phenomenon but has been a reality for a long time. Like many developed and developing
countries, Pakistan is also exposed to extremism, militancy, intolerance, radicalization, violence and terrorism particularly since the so-called U.S led war on terror going on since 9/11.

The youth bulge in Pakistan is both a challenge and an opportunity because of two main reasons. First, with 60% of the population composed of youths, it is a challenge for the state and society to empower youth with quality education, health and employment opportunities. Second, with an enormous human resource in the shape of a massive youth population, it is an opportunity for Pakistan to turn around and transform the country as a progressive, welfare oriented, developed and peaceful country with the help of the youth.

Trends in youth radicalization in Pakistan need to be analyzed, taking into account four major realities. First, religious and ethnic extremism targeting the youth population of Pakistan in the form of political parties and groups exploiting religion and ethnicity, using non-empowered youth as a weapon for advancing their vested interests. Second is the absence of a viable mechanism to inculcate leadership qualities, integrity, excellence in knowledge and wisdom in the youth. For the last 34 years, student’s unions which provided a platform to the youths of the country to demonstrate leadership qualities and to resolve issues faced by the student community are not in existence as these were banned in February 1984 by the then Martial law regime and the ban has not been lifted so far. Consequently, there exists a vacuum in the Pakistani youth population as the vehicle for their proper training which was provided by the student unions exists no more. Third, the state has totally failed to provide free, quality and compulsory education to all the school going children of Pakistan. As a result, 25 million children are out of school and are an easy target of religious extremist groups who ensure them food and shelter but at the expense of the radical transformation of their minds. Fourth,

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frustration, anger and antagonism among the youth are an outcome of the erosion of societal and ethical values which tends to generate violence in society.

This paper is an attempt to analyze and examine critically the predicament of youths in Pakistan and the surge of radicalization in relation to the future of the country. This involves examining why the radicalization of the youth in Pakistan is considered a threat to human security and as to how the energies of youths can be channelized in a positive direction. What should be the role of the state and society in empowering the youths of Pakistan and how can they be motivated and integrated in the process of social and human development? Radicalization of youth as a result of Islamic Jihad propagated since the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan and the emergence of extremist religious movements in different parts of the world, will also be analyzed in this paper with the objective of suggesting measures to mitigate the level of anger, antagonism, extremism, intolerance, violence and terrorism as far as the youths are concerned. The role of the clergy in motivating youths for peace, stability and tolerance will also be discussed as well as the obstacles that exist in this regard.

**Youth as an Asset or a Liability?**

With their enormous potential and energy, youths can be a source of progress and development but if they are not provided with a proper sense of direction and guidance, one can expect such an asset to be transformed into a liability. Conceptually speaking, extremism, intolerance, radicalization, violence and terrorism influence the minds of the youths and they are transformed into a liability rather than being an asset. As a liability and as excess baggage, a large segment of youth is perceived as a threat to society
because of the surge of extremism and intolerance. They are the ones who can easily be exploited and manipulated by the vested interest groups in order to either destabilize society or to deepen the level of violence and insecurity.

Because of four main reasons, youths can be transformed into a liability. First, is the circumstance where good and quality education is not provided to the majority of the school going age children and they either remain out of school or get low standard of education. Second is the lack of proper employment opportunities which augment frustration anger and antagonism among unemployed youth. Third, is the situation where a right kind of environment which is peaceful, and where educated and enlightened thinking predominates is not available to the youths and they therefore choose the path of crimes and violence. Fourth is the situation where the energy of youths is not utilized in healthy activities like sports and games and is diverted to things which can erode their skills for peaceful competition. In societies which are peaceful and developed, a major contribution to their success is the positive and healthy role of their youths.

There is no short cut to transforming youths from a liability to an asset but three strategies, if pursued can ensure their productive role in society. First, it should be state’s responsibility to provide free, compulsory and good quality education to all the citizens till high school so that the youths can have a good foundation thus enabling them to succeed in their practical life. With proper education, sports and extra-curricular facilities, youths will gain confidence to deal with the challenges of life.

Second, proper career and counseling for youths must be the responsibility of the state and society so that they are not left in the wilderness after completing their high school and can get training and job opportunities as a jump start in their practical life. Since an empty mind is a devil’s paradise, a youth who is engaged in productive things will not have a time to be used in negative or non-productive areas.

Third, a policy based on merit and non-discrimination is
essential in order to motivate the youths in the areas of social and human development. Proper use of time and its management will enable the youths to follow a professional approach on issues which require seriousness. Elimination of favoritism, corruption and nepotism will certainly empower the youths and help utilize their energies in a positive direction.

Undoubtedly, youths are considered as a vulnerable segment of society because they can be lured by the forces of extremism, intolerance, militancy, violence and terrorism. The only way they can be saved from being used as a tool by such forces is if they are not a liability but an asset for their community and the country.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, like many other post-colonial states, it is grappling with issues of frustration, anger and antagonism among the youths. With a population composed of a large youth strata, the challenge for the state and the society of Pakistan is how to use their potential and energy for the country’s progress and development. The government on its part has tried to tackle issues pertaining to the non-empowerment of youth by launching different programs like Prime Minister’s Youth Program, National Internship Program, youth loan scheme, Prime Minister’s laptop scheme and so forth. Furthermore, there are various programs at the non-governmental level to provide opportunities to the youths of the country, like the UNDP Youth Empowerment Program, WWWF Pakistan Youth Development Program, Pakistan Youth Outreach Foundation, Youth Parliament of Pakistan, Youth Workforce Development Program, Youth Leadership Program and many more. The purpose should not be just to launch programs for the uplifting and empowerment of youth but to make sure that the opportunities are well utilized in order to enlighten the minds of the younger generation.
Images Of Radicalization In Pakistan

The following images of radicalization in Pakistan will depict how serious the issue is:
Trends in Youth Radicalization

Why are the minds of a segment of the younger generation indoctrinated with hate, anger, intolerance and violence and how can such minds be de-radicalized? For that matter, one should be clear what radicalization is all about. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘radicalization’ means, “the action or process of causing someone to adopt radical positions on political or social issues”\(^{57}\). According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, ‘radicalization’ means “to cause (someone or something) to become more radical especially in politics.”\(^{58}\) Dictionary.com defines ‘radicalization’ as, “to make radical or more radical, as in politics -young people who

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are radicalized by extremist philosophies.” Macmillan dictionary defines ‘radicalization’ as “the process by which a person or group comes to hold more extreme views.”

According to a study on Understanding Radicalization - Review of literature published by the Center for the Study of Democracy, in Sofia, Bulgaria, “the phenomena of radicalization today develop and change at high speed, with their extreme forms manifested globally. The destructive dimensions of (violent) Islamist or right-wing radicalization have become dramatically visible in Europe posing serious challenges to European societies.” Furthermore, ‘radicalization’ denotes “the process by which political moderates become militant or increasingly support extremists and their positions.” According to a Pakistani expert on terrorism and counter radicalization, “radicalization is not a simple phenomenon that may be measured simply through support for or disapproval of violent actions. After all, despite the low support for Al Qaeda and the Taliban in the country, Pakistan has been faced with an unprecedented and devastating wave of terrorism, which far exceeds anything confronting countries with a decidedly higher level of radicalization. And that begs the question: what are the factors contributing to such a violent landscape in Pakistan, despite popular opposition to terrorism amongst the Pakistani people.” Throwing light on the radicalization of youth in the context of Pakistan he further argues that, “Pakistani youths have the same tendencies and seem confused on issues related to radicalization, extremism and terrorism, as a few recent studies suggest. A study

61 Understanding Radicalization Review of Literature Sofia: Center for the study of Democracy, 2016,
62 Ibid.,
by Brookings Institute in 2008, based on approximately 350 responses from Swat and Malakand, hinted that the increasing cases of radicalization among young people in Pakistan is due to multiple factors. A report by the British High Commission, based on a survey applied to over 1,000 youth from all over the country in 2009 highlighted the dissatisfaction and frustration of youth over the lack of systems in the country. Similarly, a survey by the Centre for Civic Education in 2009 said a vast majority of youth (69.6 per cent) believe that extremism is on the rise among youth, while an overwhelming majority of 85.4 per cent believes that the youth of Pakistan can play a constructive role in combating growing extremism in the society”.64 On the aspect of counter radicalization, this study expresses the opinion that, “counter-radicalization measures in Pakistan, both at state and civil society levels have focused almost exclusively on the nexus of radicalization, violence and terrorism and little attention has been paid to factors behind non-violent manifestations of radicalization, particularly in the youth. Moreover the typology, content and direction of civil society interventions to engage youths have also remained general in their focus and not focused exclusively on countering and/or preventing radicalization and extremism in youth”65.

Radicalization per se is a feeling which develops as a result of the following factors:

1. Severe economic hardships;
2. Unemployment and frustration generated because of lack of employment opportunities on the basis of merit;
3. Hard line and extremist interpretation of an ideology which can mesmerize the minds of people, particularly those belonging to the younger generation;
4. The permeation of intolerance against a person or a group of people following a different way of life;

64 Ibid.,
65 Ibid.,
5. Excessive belief and commitment of a particular thought or an ideology.
6. Rigid and parochial mindset.

Radicalization is a process which can be unleashed in a society which is intolerant, extremist and parochial in its approach on various issues. How a society becomes intolerant and extremist is not difficult to gauge. Much has to do with frustration and suffocation when either religion or so-called social norms are used by the vested interest groups to keep society retrogressive. The forces of retrogression see development and progress a threat to their interests and focus on youth to misuse their energy and talent for preaching hate and anger. This is exactly what has happened in Pakistan in the last four decades particularly since the so-called process of Islamization was launched by the then military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq when he was in power from July 5, 1977 till his death in an air crash on August 17, 1988. The fallout of the Afghan war and the surge of Jehadi culture financed by Saudi Arabia and the West, particularly the United States, created a new generation of Jihadis who preached a radical and parochial version of Islam.

Five major trends of youth radicalization could be observed in Pakistan. These trends are more or less also to be seen in other South Asian countries and reflect the ground realities. First, the failure of the state to provide free, compulsory and good quality education to all the children of school going age in Pakistan. As a result, around 25 million children remain out of school in Pakistan and the majority of those who are enrolled in school are denied quality education. Furthermore, the minds of children and youths are not trained for productive purposes and are tapped by extremist groups who use them for their violent and terrorist activities.

Second is the failure of religious schools to provide a better education encompassing the whole gamut of religious and worldly affairs. Unfortunately, the majority of mosques and religious schools which should have played a leadership role in bettering the lives of youths are involved in negative indoctrination. The lynching of
Mashal Khan, a student of Abdul Wali Khan University of Mardan on April 13, 2017\textsuperscript{66} on charges of blasphemy indicated the level of religious radicalization in a segment of youths who took law into their own hands and killed their fellow student. Countless incidents of violence either on sectarian, religious or ethnic grounds involve youths reflecting a radicalized mindset.

The youth of Pakistan needs a proper sense of direction so that his/her energies could be channelized in the best possible manner. Radicalization of youth takes place when open-mindedness and a liberal, tolerant and enlightened way of life is non-existent or limited.

Third, the banning of student’s union by the then regime of General Zia-ul-Haq on February 9, 1984 under the pretext of student violence on the campuses derailed the process of grooming and training of students. Leadership qualities among the youths which were created as a result of student’s unions and participatory election processes ceased to exist following the banning of student’s unions.

The vacuum, which was created as a result of the banning of student’s unions, promoted extremism, intolerance, militancy, violence and terrorism. It has been now more than 34 years that student’s unions have been banned in Pakistan and no government which came to power since the death of the then President Zia-ul has been able to restore student’s unions which tends to deepen the level of frustration as far as the youth of Pakistan is concerned. The trend of indifference to the issues faced by the student community in Pakistan further deepened the level of radicalization among the youths of the country.

Fourth, the trend of undermining rationality, moderation and tolerance has also contributed to motivate those forces who tried to impose their will and way of life on others. If the young minds are not

peaceful and rational, the outcome is the deepening of polarization in society. Religious, sectarian, class and ethnic intolerance gets an impetus when youths who constitute the majority segment of the population of Pakistan are not united to establish peace and sanity in society and to strive for the management and resolution of issues which are a cause of social and economic backwardness in society.

Finally, social media has emerged as a major platform as far as promoting extremism, intolerance, militancy, violence, radicalization and terrorism is concerned. It is this mode of information which in the last one decade or so tends to possess a huge following and readership. Information and messages spread from social media targeting a particular community or a group can influence the minds of young people thus causing instability and violence in society.

A Pakistan National Development Report on the youths of Pakistan was released on May 2, 2018. The report compiled by Dr. Adil Najam and Dr. Faisal Bari in their findings stated: “Also evident is the fact that the intolerance, doubt and distrust that defines society at large has been passed on to our young amongst some segments of our youth. Within this context, the space for meaningful engagement is even more constrained. Low levels of mobility, lack of public spaces for youth engagement, and high levels of doubt, distrust and intolerance are a toxic mix.” 67

If there are trends of radicalization among the youth of Pakistan, there are also trends of de-radicalization which needs to be analyzed. A counter narrative emphasizing positive signs among the youths of Pakistan reveals the following:

1. A sizeable section of youths of Pakistan possess a positive approach and want to better the socio-economic conditions of their country.
2. The National Action Plan (NAP) 68 launched following the unfortunate and violent incident at the Army Public

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67 Dr. Adil Najam, “To Be Young In Pakistan” *Dawn* (Karachi), April 29, 2018.
School Peshawar on December 16, 2014 resulting in the killing of scores of school children by terrorists, focusses on mobilizing youths to de-radicalize society and promote tolerance.

3. Efforts are being made to prevent religious schools from preaching hate and intolerance.

4. The majority of the youths reject radicalization, extremism, intolerance, militancy, violence and terrorism as they call these phenomena as being destructive of their future.

The Way Out

What is the future of radicalization in Pakistan and how can the forces of socio-economic and political change in the country help the youths to adopt a moderate, peaceful, rational and enlightened approach on critical issues?

Much depends on Pakistan’s economic and social conditions. With better human and social development, the menace of extremism and radicalization can be effectively dealt with. Since an empty mind is a devil’s paradise, the engagement of youth of Pakistan in the process of social and human development will definitely neutralize those elements who exploit unemployed and frustrated youth for their vested interests. Yet, the way out from extremism and radicalization also depends on the country’s leadership to provide free, compulsory and good quality of education to all the citizens of Pakistan till high school. Eradication of class and social stratification in education will go a long way in promoting moderation, tolerance, reasoning and enlightenment among the youths.

Nevertheless, there is no short cut to deal with the radicalization of youth and trends which shape an intolerant mindset need to be understood and addressed accordingly. For that matter, the best arrangement to de-radicalize youths in Pakistan is: first, promote freedom, broadmindedness, tolerance and enlightenment through better education and social training and second, provide
opportunities for personality development and career guidance. The energies of youths must be channelized in positive things like studies, sports, positive use of social media and various extra-curricular activities.

In the ultimate analysis, the growing youth bulge in Pakistan is a major challenge for the progress and development of the country. A disempowered, frustrated and violent youth can further deepen Pakistan’s economic, social and political predicament in the years to come. It has been rightly pointed out thus by Faisal Bari, the co-author of UNDP’s *Pakistan National Human Development Report on Youth*: “The youth need to be heard. They need to be engaged. They need to be ready to lead. Suppressing youth voices and not giving them space, as we have been seeing recently in a number of contexts (journalism, social movements, academia), will lead us further down a blind alley”.69 If the youths of Pakistan are provided a better future in terms of quality education, better health facilities, access to clean and safe drinking water, freedom to think and be creative in their thoughts, better sports facilities and parks, one can expect that only in one generation the transformation of Pakistan from an under-developed to a developed state can take place. The investment on youth means investing on the future of Pakistan.

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(Footnotes)

1 While conducting survey at Pole-Charkhi, AJO met Mawlawai Mohammad Amin who has since been transferred to Bagram and who was considered one such charismatic individual. Whenever he held gatherings and preached, other Taliban or prison inmates who heard him would become emotional to the extent crying in response to his stories.

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