

Tracing the Roots of Radicalism

P. M. Suresh Kumar

Department of Social Work, Priyadarshini College of Arts and Science, Kerala - 676517, India

Orcid ID 0002 - 9540 - 0909

E - mail: [sureshkumarpmsk\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:sureshkumarpmsk[at]gmail.com)

Abstract: *Radicalism is an intense and fast expanding phenomenon of modern times that threaten human collective life. Terrorism is an extreme form of radicalism. It connotes destructive, annihilating and wrongly composed ideology leading to subversive activity. Certain nations are hot beds of terror related violence. It is too few in some other nations. Interestingly we find that certain population are prone to unrest and annihilating tendencies while certain others are largely free from it. Different reasons could be attributed to radicalism. Political instability, poverty, oppression, violation of human rights etc. are most commonly cited reasons. This is further exemplified by the fact that educationally acquired or politically or religiously indoctrinated ideologies act as precipitating factors. Nevertheless, the incidence and intensity of recurrence point to certain genetically acquired characteristics as well as psychological predisposition also. We mean by radicalism, the tendency to revolt against the system or state, or any aggressive outrage on any section/s of population. Radicalism is not a solution but a cause that demands a solution. This paper is an attempt to uncover the roots of radicalism and analyse the role of genetic, psychological, socio - cultural, ideological and intellectual factors contributing to it.*

Keywords: Radicalism, Terrorism, Subversive activity, Predisposing factor, Precipitating factor

1. Introduction

The world has been witnessing a lot of turbulent times at different times during its history. Wars and armed conflicts have played a big role in reshaping the destiny of mankind to the present. In the last century and later a new cult of radicalism has emerged which in modern time assumed disproportionate size, called terrorism. Terrorism is an extreme form of radicalism. It connotes destructive, annihilating and wrongly composed ideology leading to subversive activities. It is diametrically opposite of 'win - win' situation. Rather it starts with loss and ends in loss. It is interesting that those indulging in terror are fully well aware that they are bound to end up in loss of life. In a way they end up knowingly. The only intention is to inflict severest casualties on the enemy. Demobilizing the subjects by exhausting their defensive capacity and creating fear are the dictum of terror. That's how we say terrorism is a radicalism using terror to create fear. Interestingly terrorism as a sugar coated pill have found appeal in securing political power and state supremacy, of late in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria etc.

2. Defining Radicalism

At the outset, we can say that radicalism is an expression of difference by word or action towards what is believed and practised as desirable. Radicalism is considered a deviance in most cultures and sometimes as a symptom of criminality that should be punished. Generally speaking it is not uncommon that people differ in opinions and feelings. But two important attributes qualify to call it radical. Firstly the differences should be against a system and the way its institutions function. However in dictatorial regimes the system and the leadership are one at the same. Secondly, the person finds himself part of the system while in conflict with it. A radical is considered as enemy of the system. History shows that radicalism could turn to be an offensive force to

bring social change. However in many societies radicals are eliminated by the state.

3. Distinguishing Conventional and Modern Radicalism

Conventional radicalism is a relatively modest expression of difference to ideas, objects or system through symbolic protest. It may take the form of agitation or stray violence by individuals or groups. Poverty, oppression, violation of human rights and political instability are the key contributors of radicalism. The latest of these examples is the public outrage in Sri Lanka due to failure of the government to address shortage of food, essentials and check price escalation. In history we see innumerable examples of oppressive regimes who succumbed to revolt. The history of the blacks in South Africa emerged through mass agitation and armed clashes against the ruling white regime point to how oppression induces radicalism.

It is very difficult to say precisely when modern radicalism originated. But the developments in the past five decades point to a clear indication of the evolution of using terror as a modern means of expression of radicalism. Terror strikes were reported across the globe, including the US, Australia, European countries such as France, Germany, Sweden, Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar and Sri Lanka particularly during the last two decades. Instances of crazy use of weapon for man - slaughter are to be read differently from terrorism. An act of terror refers to individual or organised use of destructive and annihilating means by using weapons or explosives to eliminate the object, based on a learned or indoctrinated ideology which warrants such action, the object being person or group of persons or establishments or institutions. It is usually an act of revolt against hateful institutions aimed at quick results. The typical example of Maoist movement in India displays the change from conventional radicalism to modern radicalism.

Table 1: Conventional and Modern Radicalism

SL. No	Distinguishing factors	Conventional Radicalism	Modern Radicalism
1	Origin	Mostly individual origin	Largely shared by groups
2	Nature	Ideology of protest	Ideology of destruction
3	Target	Protest against system	Challenge against system
4	Basis	Arising from personal or social experience	Contributed by educational/ religious learning
5	Mode of origin	Reaction to perceived oppression	Championing virtual causes
6	Action	Crude or no weapons	Sophisticated weaponry
7	Extent of loss	Less or moderately damaging	Hugely damaging
8	Ideology	Radical ideology	Religious or political fundamentalism

4. Roots of Radicalism

Radicalism could be looked at from a psychological and genealogical perspective. Predispositions that arise out of these are conducive to rebellious attitude. Such personality types reflect psychological and genetic deformity. Rebellious personality could be defined as those bearing the mindset or psychological orientation to resist, oppose or revolt. It is a certain form of aggression - induced personality. These acts as predisposing factor that carry high degree of susceptibility to bolster values of hatred, resulting in subversive activities. Religion by itself is a strong precipitating factor that operates at the intellectual and ideological plane. Rebellious predisposition, if attracted by

religious text, result in selective learning. Some of these learning from texts are educationally conveyed through training. Training could be formal or informal, conscious or unconscious to the incumbent.

A combination of predisposing and precipitating factors double the chances of active radicalism in a person. These apart, the peculiar social and cultural characteristic of the milieu may pop up insecurity, identity crisis and challenges to human rights, acting as a promoting factor. No matter the insecurity is real or perceived, over a period of time, it can manifest in radicalism. (This relationship of factors is depicted in chart1).

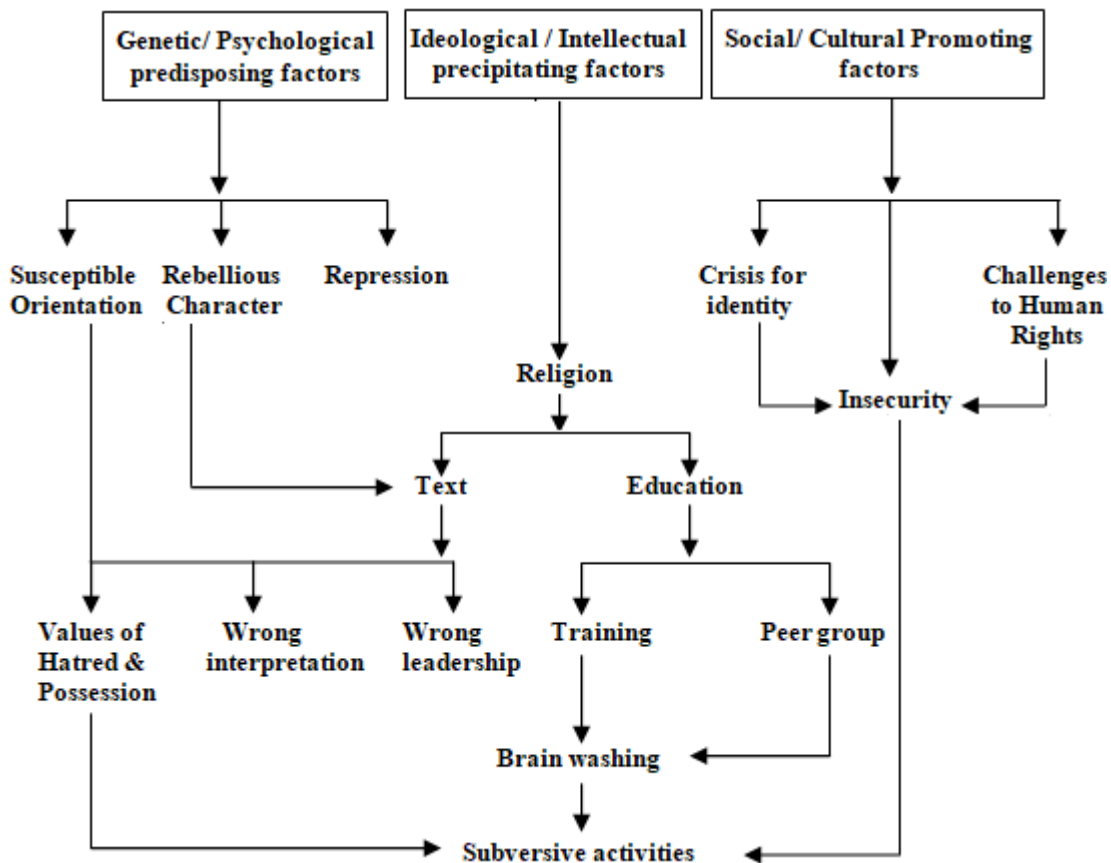


Chart 1: How Radicalism Evolve

5. Conclusion

The turn of the century witnessed a sudden spurt in an extremely dangerous form of radicalism called terrorism. It has become a global phenomenon that has posed threat to mankind. It is an ideology of annihilation that unleashes terror through destruction. An investigation into the roots of

‘modern radicalism’ as it is called, points to a set of predisposing factors, precipitating factors and promoting factors. All the three are interrelated if not independent.

References

- [1] Baron, Robert. A (2015), Social Psychology, Pearson, New Delhi.
- [2] Chattopadhyay. A (2013), Poverty and Social Exclusion in India, Rawat Publications, India.
- [3] Das, Paramita. P (2018), Social Problems in India - A Contemporary Discourse, Anjali, Publishers, New Delhi.
- [4] Hurlock, Elizabeth. B (1981), Developmental Psychology, Mc Graw Hill Education (India) Private Limited, Chennai.
- [5] Jayaraj. D and Subramannian. S (2010), Poverty, Inequality, and Population, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- [6] Kumar, Suresh. P. M (2020), Migration, Threats to Identity and Diminishing Human Dignity, Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary, Vol.5, Issue - 2, ISSN: 2455 - 3085
- [7] Lee, Su H (2010) Debating New Social Movements, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, India.
- [8] Moritsugu, Joh et. al (2014) Community Psychology, Routledge, London.
- [9] Sarason, Irwin. G (2017), Abnormal Psychology Person, New Delhi.
- [10] Shyam Lal (2010), Studies in Social Protest, Rawat Publications, New Delhi.
- [11] Stephen Mary, Tariq Modood and Judith Squires (2004), Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights, Cambridge University Press, U. K.
- [12] Zachariah et. al (2003), Dynamics of Migration in Kerala, Orient Longman, Hyderabad.