



Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation And De-Radicalisation In The Union Territory Of Jammu And Kashmir¹

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1. Introduction

The year 1989 is marked as the year of the beginning of cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. In the last three decades (till 2017), as per government records more than 41,000 people have lost their lives, this includes civilians, security personnel and terrorists. It is widely accepted that cross-border terrorism has fervent support among the local radicalized people. The radicalized locals not only provide a support base for these terrorists but some radicalized youth also end up being terrorists themselves. In the initial period of terrorist violence, the problem of radicalisation was neither understood nor discussed. However, with growing global research about the phenomena of radicalisation, there is a gradual increase in interest in understanding the process of radicalisation in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir too. Consequently, the policymakers and other stakeholders are also mulling the counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation measures, which can be adopted in this case. First of all, the extent and intensity of radicalisation are gauged. And it is found that the malaise is very deep and wide. In some cases, even the sacred structure of family setup is playing a critical role in the process of radicalisation. Many social and political institutions and processes have an instrumental role in distorting the individual worldview. The psychological construction of the mind of an individual is distorted right from childhood. The social, political and religious milieu of the state makes an individual more vulnerable to radicalisation. For any counter-radicalisation and deradicalisation approach, the fundamental question is how to significantly address the substantive issues of the milieu and at the same time work toward the related process of altering the perception.

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2. Understanding the concepts

The terms radicalisation, violent extremism and all other associated processes evade a universally accepted definition. There are several working definitions used in research, policy documents and reference books. In most definitions, radicalisation is understood as a process and violent extremism is taken as an ideology. An individual moves through this process and may reach a stage where she/he will commit violence. Essentially, when a person is a violent extremist, she/he can advocate and use violence as a means to achieve her/his ideological or political goals. However, there is no unilinear process from radicalization to violent extremism. Radical thinking does not directly lead to engaging in violence. A large number of people who can be classified as holding radical viewpoints, do not engage in terrorism. At the same time, it is very pertinent to note that many terrorists—even those who claim a "cause"—are not deeply ideological and may not "radicalise" in the traditional sense. Different pathways and mechanisms work in different ways for different people at different times and in different contextsⁱ. One of the most comprehensive definitions is provided by Professor Schmid. Radicalisation is defined as "an individual or collective (group) process in which one or both sides in a conflict dyad abandon normal practices of dialogue, compromise, and tolerance between political actors and groups with divergent interests in favour of a growing commitment to engage in confrontational conflict-waging tactics. These can be (i) the use of (nonviolent) pressure and coercion, (ii) different forms of political violence other than terrorism, or (iii) acts of violent extremism in the form of terrorism and war crimes. On the rebel factions' side, the process is generally accompanied by ideological socialisation away from mainstream or status quo-oriented positions and toward more radical or extremist positions involving a dichotomous world view and acceptance of an alternative focal point of political mobilisation outside the dominant political order as the existing system is no longer recognised as appropriate or legitimateⁱⁱ."

There is a rapid spurt in radicalisation-related literature in the last two decades. There is also an attempt to build models to understand the processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation. The states and policymakers can use these models while dealing with the challenge of radicalisation. Some of the important models are; the Staircase Model by Fathali M. Moghaddam, the pyramid model of radicalization developed by the researchers of START (Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism, Maryland, USA), A social-developmental model of radicalization proposed by Andreas Beelmann, the Phoenix Model of Disengagement and Deradicalisation from Terrorism and Violent Extremism, the Constructivist Model of Radicalization and Deradicalization etc.

3. Radicalisation in Kashmir

From the perspective of radicalisation, the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir remains the most intractable problem for India. In comparison to other Indian states, this UT is the worst affected victim of radicalization, especially religious radicalism.

The majority of Muslim youth in the Kashmir Valley are increasingly drawn to extremist political and religious ideas. These ideas question the legitimacy of the state and sometimes project the vision of a Sharia-based state or Islamic rule. There are two important elements of this phenomenon, which occur simultaneously. One is the rejection of the existing state and social cohesion/harmony based on accommodation and shared heritage. Second is the acceptance of a vision which is rooted not in India but rather in the narratives originating in Islamic countries.

The dominant ideology of radicalisation stems from Wahhabism. The Wahhabi ideology is used to indoctrinate young minds with conflict-driven narratives. This alien idea is inimical to the historic cultural traditions of the Kashmiri people and society. Many times, the radical ideology makes the traditional Kashmiri and Indian practices taboo to Islam. Unfortunately, the Kashmiri society was scrubbed of its original qualities by a jihad-oriented conflict. On the other hand, radical and militant Islam, which is supported and funded by Pakistan-based entities has made strong inroads into Kashmiri society.

There are many Jihadi organizations active in Jammu and Kashmirⁱⁱⁱ - Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuA, presently known as Harkat-ul Mujahideen), Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Harkat-ul Mujahideen (HuM, previously known as Harkat-ul-Ansar), Al Badr, Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen (JUM), Harkat-ul-Jehad-al-Islami (HuJI), Al Umar Mujahideen, Dukhtaran-e-Millat (DeM), Lashkar-e-Omar (Leo), Lashkar-e-Jabbar (LeJ), Tehrik-ul-Mujahideen, Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), Mutahida Jihad Council (MJC).

In the context of Kashmir, both the personal and public spaces are playing a critical role in the process of radicalisation. The penetration of the 'Arabised' version of Islam is deep and wide. This is evident in the gradual change in dressing patterns in the last four decades in the valley. The local traditional Islam is almost obliterated. One who does not follow the 'Arabised' version of Islam is not treated as a true Muslim. And this belief is enforced both in private spaces and in public spaces.

The deep penetration of the Jihadi ideology can be understood by an incidence. "A young militant was caught in the middle of a gun battle with security forces. He called his father to discuss what he should do next, sensing an opportunity. His father advised him not to surrender and instead to give his life. He thanked Allah for allowing his son to engage in jihad. He assured his son that his efforts would not be in vain. His sacrifice, on the other hand, would ensure a place in heaven for the next seven generations of his family^{iv}".

From the family setup to the terror organisations; the youth are provoked to launch a war for "*Ghazwa-e-Hind*" (Battle of India). Mosques in Kashmir's valley have become meeting places for people to discuss threats to Islam. Madrasas have also become hotbeds for student radicalization. Sites like these teach children about Muslims' believers and non-believers (*kaafirs*). Young Kashmiri militants are openly posting images and videos on social media, portraying themselves as heroic 'warriors' — dressed in fatigues, brandishing guns, laughing or smiling in a woodland setting in an 'ISIS-like' fashion, glamourizing militancy in the hopes of attracting more youth. On July 8, 2016, the execution of Burhan Muzaffar Wani, a 22-year-old HM militant commander, was highlighted as the most vivid and horrifying manifestation of this 'internet trend.' Demonstrators' improved ability to connect and receive information on platforms other than those controlled by the institution they were protesting against allowed for large-scale protests in the aftermath of his death^v.

A conflict zone activist^{vi} in his incisive analysis has drawn important conclusions about the process of radicalisation in Kashmir. He argues that there is a sense of pride associated with Jihad and people give respect to individuals and families who are associated with Jihad. The literature related to Jihad and "Ghazwa-e-Hind" is easily available and accessible both in physical form and through online sources. It is very pertinent to point out that there is no direct causal relationship between unemployment, poverty, underdevelopment and radicalisation in the Kashmir valley. Many a time, the radicalized youth are well educated and do not come from poor sections of society.

4. Counter radicalisation and Deradicalisation efforts

In the national symposium on counter-radicalisation in March 2022, the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Manoj Sinha^{vii} elaborated upon the views of the current regime. He highlighted the three important pillars of deradicalisation in Kashmir; Families, Islamic scholars and women. Islamic scholars can play a critical role in challenging the narratives of the terrorist and radical extremists. Their arguments will delegitimize the radical narratives. The families can sense the minor deviation and help and support the youth. The women of the community can be active agents in spreading the message of peace.

From his speech, an observer can gauge some important elements of the deradicalisation philosophy of the government. One, the government highlights the syncretic culture of Jammu and Kashmir, where the concept of '*Kashmiriyat*' is highlighted. Here the concept is elaborated to highlight the original tradition of communal harmony and peace in the valley. Two, Important stakeholders in the process of deradicalisation have been highlighted; Islamic scholars, families and women. Third, local and rural development works are touted as an antidote to dissatisfaction amongst youth. Fourth, there is an effort to build a sense of national and social responsibility amongst youth. Fifth, drug abuse is also identified as a conduit, which can wean the youth towards radical organisations and individuals. Hence a concerted effort is made toward curbing the menace of drug abuse and drug trafficking.

This is to acknowledge that till now there is no policy or programme which intends to address this challenge. However, there are non-coordinated efforts at local and state levels in this direction. Even the goodwill activities taken up by the Indian army helped in empowering vulnerable individuals and communities. In recent times, certain monumental steps were taken by the government of India and also contribute positively to the counter-radicalisation narrative. We can elaborate on two important steps.

The abrogation of Article 370 and the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 also indirectly play a role in counter-radicalisation efforts. Abrogation of Article 370, removes all the illusions of 'independence of Kashmir', and hence can prove to be an important step in discouraging radicalisation in the long term. In short term, there might be some spurt in radicalisation, but a strong and clear stand by the government will send a decisive signal to both the recruiters and the vulnerable section. On August 5, 2019, Hon`ble President of India Sh. Ramnath Kovind issued a notification in concurrence with Article 370(3), which repealed Articles 370 and 35A and abrogated the special privileges given to the state as a part of the special status like- a separate constitution and flag of the state, restrictions on the sale and purchase of property by the residents of other

Indian states. Following the event, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated into the two union territories, namely, the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the Union Territory of Ladakh. Further, the new emerging condition will allow for the better mingling of the population of other states with the UT of Jammu and Kashmir. This will help in removing the alienation of the youth of the valley and is an important step in national integration. The youth of the UT will gradually understand the machinations of the foreign powers and realise the fruits of shared destiny with the people of other states.

In December 2019, the Parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019. It amended the Citizenship Act, of 1955 by providing a pathway to Indian citizenship for persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis or Christians, and arrived in India before the end of December 2014^{viii}. By granting citizenship to non-Islamic minorities who were forced to flee from religious persecution, the government set the stage for publicly expressing the torture suffered by these people. Thus, the government has reiterated its strong will to overcome difficult situations. Given the relevance of this Act in Kashmir, the messaging becomes clear that the government is ready to consolidate its position and counter all efforts against radical violence.

5. Major Challenges for Counter radicalisation and deradicalisation in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir

There are issues of economic underdevelopment, gainful employment, infrastructure, and basic and modern amenities. These issues do not have a direct causal link with radicalisation. However, these issues feed into the radicalisation narrative. Therefore, the economic underdevelopment of the region poses a major challenge. The issue of corruption and a non-responsive, non-accountable bureaucracy can also be understood with a similar logic.

Till now there is no comprehensive and coordinated effort or policy in this direction. The absence of a clear understanding among the bureaucrats and security personnel also acts as a limitation.

One of the most important challenges before any proposed approach/policy would be the phenomenon of glorification of terrorism and the complex problem of grooming to be radical by the family members.

Another major challenge relates to the perceived religious duty of jihad and provocations for 'Azadi'.

6. Conclusion

The recognition and understanding of the problem of radicalisation is the first step toward de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation. For a long time, terrorist violence was seen as an incidence and the terrorist was seen as someone who just belongs to a terror organisation. This type of understanding is now giving way to an understanding which looks at all these phenomena in their entirety and treats this as a process. Hence the process of radicalisation if not intervened can lead to violence, which is known as acts of terrorism.

Unlike other places, the process of radicalization in Kashmir is also part of a 'proxy war' waged by foreign powers against India. The direct funding and support of the foreign powers make the traditional methods of deradicalisation less effective in this Union Territory. The first response that comes to our mind is to stop

the foreign inimical powers from playing any role. Now, in a democratic country with the protection of fundamental rights, a state cannot limit its citizens. Moreover, in this era of interconnectedness, it is very difficult to create barriers in the process. Under these given circumstances, any deradicalisation effort will need to work within limitations and make the best use of available resources and avenues.

Despite the chances of oversimplification, we can define the broader guidelines for deradicalisation in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir. We can call this the 3D5C strategy.

3Ds-

1. Delink- There is a need to create barriers between the radical messages coming from foreign sores and vulnerable individuals. In the case of Kashmir, at present, the whole society can be taken as a vulnerable group.
2. De-legitimize - The religious narrative provides legitimacy to the terrorist ideology. The scholars of Islam can propagate peaceful interpretations of the religious texts. The legitimacy of the Jihadi ideology can also be challenged with an emphasis on local traditions of the religion Vis-a-vis the imported and imposed cacophony.
3. Decentralize - Any meaningful de-radicalisation effort should be employed with the full involvement of the local population and local authorities. For this purpose, a decentralized approach should be taken, but the decentralization here does not mean a lack of coordination.

5Cs

1. Create- The creation of avenues for non-religious education and employment is critical.
2. Construct - construction of essential infrastructure at the local level will provide a boost to the economy and also generate employment.
3. Collaborate- Every deradicalisation effort requires the collaboration of various governmental, non-governmental and social organisations.
4. Connect- The region should be connected with every major city of India through direct air and road transport. The connection should also be understood in terms of emotional connection. The people-to-people connection is of utmost importance.
5. Curb corruption- Corruption in local administration is an unseen catalyst, which needs to be curbed. And at the same time, the government should make efforts to alter the perception of administration and bureaucracy by being more transparent and less cumbersome.

End Notes

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^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} Awaam ki Awaaz (2022) Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 23 March, <https://awaamkibaat.jk.gov.in/lt-governor-addresses-national-symposium-on-counter-radicalisation-a-very-significant-initiative-by-youth-women-and-islamic-scholars-of-kashmir-valley/>, accessed on 1 April 2022.

^{viii} Ministry Of Home Affairs Notification S.O. 172(E)" (PDF). *The Gazette of India*. 10 January 2020. Retrieved 10 January 2020.

