

Pathways of Youth Radicalization in Pashtun Society: Applying the Anomie and Strain Theory

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Abstract

This article investigates the normlessness and strain situation radicalizing impact on youth radicalization in Pashtun semi-tribal society. The major objective of the study to explore the Anomic and Strain Condition in Pashtun Society in the light of sociological theories and effects of anomic situation on youth radicalization in Pashtun society. For this study Pashtun, society is selected as a case study because Pashtun society has been passing from the transitional stage. Keeping in view the nature of the study the qualitative paradigms were adopted for data collection and analysis. Different themes were derived from the primary data. Emile Durkheim and Robert Merton theories are applied to analyse themes which focuses the anomic and strain conditions in Pashtun society. It is revealed that youth in Pashtun society faces the normlessness and strain situation. It is investigated that the rapid socio-cultural and technological change after the advent of globalization pushed youth to anomic and strain situation, which exposed youth to radicalization. It is revealed that the normlessness and strain situation indirectly set a stage for the youth radicalization in Pashtun society. For the affective counter-radicalization the sociological facts need to be investigated to curb the favourable socio-cultural environment of radicalization.

Keywords: Anomie, Strain Theory, Transitional Societies, Radicalization of Society, Cultural Norms, Pashtun Society.

1. Introduction

Normlessness and strain situation provide congenial social environment to radicalization especially in transitional societies. The motivating factors of youth radicalization are overlapping each other. Poverty, identity crises, and violent literature are considered the causal factors of radicalization (Sedgwick, 2010; Atran, 2010; McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008; Berman, 2011). However, there are multifaceted socio-cultural, psychological and political factors reinforce radicalization (Richardson, 2006; Horgan, 2004). Hence, the complex causal factors of radicalization make it difficult to clearly define its concept (Besley & Persson, 2011). However, in this study radicalization refers to set of beliefs that allow them to use violence for socio-political objectives or in other words any activity which threaten the existing social and democratic order (Jenkins, 2007). However, radicalization cannot only be confined to the

disturbance of social and democratic order; rather it involves adopting opinions, views, and ideas, which could lead to terrorism.

The rise of radicalization in the society emerges in the shape of militancy and terrorism. However, various socio-cultural factors precipitate, initiate, and sustain its process in the different parts of the world, particularly in the transitional societies (Chrysochoou & Lyons, 2011). Hence, the identification of socio-cultural factors in Pashtun cultural setting is considered as essential to understand the radicalization process and pathways. The tribal and semi-tribal societies have strong traditions and their cultural norms and values have significant influence on their behaviour. The responses of the tribal people to the socio-cultural changes are different as compared to the modern societies. Moreover, various conflicts in the Pashtun region have resulted to slowdown the socio-cultural evolution of Pashtun, therefore; it is difficult for them to give rational and logical response to socio-cultural changes after the emergence of globalization.

Globalization, rapid socio-cultural change, dissolution of traditional communities and identity crises are considered the macro reinforcing factors of radicalization in the different parts of the world (Abadie, 2004; Chenoweth, 2010; Helfstein, 2014; Pittel & Rubbelke, 2012; Piazza, 2008; Speckhard, 2007). While, at the micro level, the social groups, social interactions, family ties, social networks and strain push youth towards radicalization (Bjorgo, 2005; Clayton *et al.*, 1998; Abbas, 2011). At the macro level, the religion, social structure, and anomie also push the people towards radicalization (Al-Khattar, 2003). The young people usually push from the moderate and mainstream beliefs towards the extreme views. These factors can increase the susceptibility of youth towards radicalization (Lemieux, 2006; Ranstrop, 2010). The rapid social and cultural change as a result of the globalization has an adverse effect and create normlessness in the traditional societies which provides a congenial environment to the youth radicalization.

Hence, this research study investigates the socio-cultural reinforcing factors of youth radicalization in the Pashtun society. Moreover, this study analysed the socio-cultural factors of youth radicalization in the light of Anomie and Strain theories. The objectives of the study are: a) to analyse the Anomic and Strain Condition in Pashtun Society in the light of sociological theories; and b) to explore the effects of anomic situation on youth radicalization in Pashtun society.

Youth are more susceptible to join the terrorist organizations due to social disorder and normlessness situation. Hence, this study is designed to explore radicalization, which mostly occurs due to certain anomic, and strain condition in Pashtun society. The key research questions of the study are: a) how the current anomic and strain condition can be explained in the light of Sociological theories? b) What are the possible effects of the strain and anomic condition on the youth radicalization in Pashtun society?

2. Research Methodology

Keeping in view the nature and objectives of the study, the qualitative paradigms were adopted to investigate the socio-cultural factors of youth radicalization. The qualitative paradigms were used for the completion of this study. In-depth interviews and observation were used for data collection. Questions were asked about the impact of rapid socio-cultural, economic, and technological change on Pashtun culture and current normlessness situation in Pashtun.

Different themes were derived from the primary data to see the radicalize effect of the strain and anomic condition on youth in Pashtun society. All steps were followed of the thematic analysis. Themes were explained in the light of sociological theories to understand the different aspects of radicalization in Pashtun society. The radicalizing effects of normlessness situation and strain situation are explained in the light of sociological theories.

2.1. Tools of Data Collection

The qualitative data was collected through in-depth interview from the respondents. The interview method was selected to get in-depth information about the socio-cultural fabrics of Pashtun, which have significant influence on the youth behaviour. The unstructured interview schedule allowed the researcher to ask leading and relevant questions, which served the purpose of the research.

2.2. Respondent Selection and Sample Size

The purposive sample technique was used. The population of the study was unknown therefore; the purposive sample technique was selected. Pashtun society was selected as case study therefore; the data was collected from the Pashtun cultural experts, security experts and from the organizations members who have practical experience in the projects of de-radicalization in district Peshawar and Khyber agency. Peshawar is the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Security and cultural experts are selected from Peshawar because major organizations offices are situated here. The community members were selected from Peshawar and Khyber agency. The total 30 respondents were selected through purposive sampling technique. The data collection was stopped on the saturated point.

3. Theorizing Anomie and Strain Situation in Pashtun Society

There are many possible theoretical frameworks that might be applied to understand the process of radicalization (Maskaliunaite, 2015). Durkheim (1972) coined the anomie theory. He believed that individuals are connected with each other through cultural norms. Rapid socio-cultural changes disturb the process of social integration and social regulation. Social integration refers to individuals ties or bonds with broader society and social regulation deals with the external constrains on individuals to stop them from deviating the social norms in particularly society. The social regulation and social integration fluctuate in the transitional societies as a result of rapid socio-cultural changes. Semi-tribal society of Pashtun has been passing from the transitional stage due to rapid socio-cultural changes and continuous conflict. The natural evolution of Pashtun society has been disturbed due to these rapid and unnatural changes (Yousaf & Furrukhzad, 2020). Resultantly, social regulation and integration have lost control over the affairs of youth.

In this regard, Durkheim (2013) believed that social regulation and social integration are too low or too high in any society face challenges in the process of stabilization. Social regulation in Pashtun society loses control over the youth affaires. Their cultural norms, which are supposed to maintain social integration and regulation, are not enough in the current condition to regulate the affair of society. However, in certain cases, the social regulation is too high and it creates challenges to accommodate youth themselves with it in Pashtun society. They are not allowed to follow their own choices. In spite of their exposure to the outside world, they are strictly bound to the old traditions in Pashtun society. They feel cultural suffocation after their

exposure to the outside world as result of globalization. Too high social regulation causes socio-cultural suffocation, which marginalize youth in Pashtun society towards radicalization. Socio-cultural suffocation occurs where the youth is not allowed opting personal choice in different matters. The too low and too high social regulations or integration increases the youth susceptibility to radicalization.

He believed that too low or too high social regulation and social integration cause four type suicide or self-harming behaviour deviating from institutional norms. The person commits the egoistic suicide when his/her integration is too low with the broader society. Low integration of youth in Pashtun society compels youth on self-harming behaviour and they adopt undemocratic or violent means to fulfil their desires. Altruistic suicide the people commit when their social integration is too high. In high social integration, the people are enthusiastic or sentimental which increase their susceptibility to suicide. The breakdown of social equilibrium or social regulation is too low then the individual commit anomic suicide. When social regulation is too high then it pushes the people towards the fatalistic suicide.

Anomic condition or anomie can be seen in Pashtun society after the rapid socio-cultural changes. Anomie refers to the normlessness situation. Anomie occurs as a result of low social integration or the insufficient constrain to keep people away from committing deviant act. A society can be considered anomic when cultural norms lose regularity power over the individual action (Thompson, 2003). For instance, Pashtun cultural norms have also lost grip over the affairs of youth and they cannot be controlled through social sanction. The normative order is ineffective in the tribal or semi-tribal society because where things can be only controlled through social order. Pashtun society is considered a semi-tribal society and social order can be maintained by culture. The unnatural and rapid socio-economic and technological change in the last four decades creates anomic and strain conditions. The Soviet-Afghan war distorted the socio-cultural norms, and hamper the process of smooth evolution of the Pashtun society. Once again, in the war on terror, the new waves of terrorism brought various socio-economic changes and disturbed the natural evolution of Pashtun society. These changes in the socio-economic conditions affected the social regulation of Pashtun society. It confuses the youth and they are not able to properly accommodated themselves which increases their susceptibility towards radicalization.

Moreover, the Merton (1973) stated that anomie is micro level concept. He believed that deviance is an individual phenomenon. In other words, legitimate means to reach legitimate ends are not available for all people, especially for the people of lower class or poor people. When legitimate means are not available, it causes strain (commonly known as stress). He believed that there are five types of adoption, conformity (institutionalized goals and institutionalized means), innovation (institutionalized goals and unconventional means), ritualism (institutionalized means and do not accept institutionalized goals), retreatism (not accepted the institutionalized goals and nor means), rebellion (not accepted the legitimacy of institutionalized goals and means). The rebellions are sociological true aliens and they do not accept cultural goals and means. These individuals do not accept the legitimacy of institutionalized goals and means and similarity can be seen between the terrorist and deviant in the light of Merton (1973).

He identifies that the society can be anti-social in which the legitimize means and goals are not coordinated. It creates cultural chaos which results in anomie and normless condition. Moreover, poverty, limited opportunity and shared system of success symbols results in

anomie. Therefore, individuals react in an anti-social manner because the society is anti-social. For strain theories, deprivation and desperation provide sufficient motivation for us to violate laws and deviate from norms of the society. The youth in Pashtun society do not have legitimate means to achieve their cultural goals and they are stressful and be easily misled towards the radicalization. The youth face severe pressure to achieve their cultural goals and they have no available means to achieve it. Therefore, they are more prone to the radicalization in the Pashtun society.

4. Analysis of Anomic and Strain Condition on Youth Radicalization

In the light of sociological theories (as discussed above) Pashtun society faces anomic and strain conditions. Radicalization does not take place in vacuum. It takes place in the socio-cultural setting. Therefore, the socio-cultural factors have significant influence on its process. People do not adopt radical thoughts and ideas at once rather gradually they start inclination towards radicalization (Borum, 2011; Elliott, 2007; Ramakrishna, 2009). In its process various strain, anomie, socio-cultural chaos provides congenial environment to youth radicalization in Pashtun society. Structural inequalities, deprivation, poverty, and conflicts set a stage for youth radicalization in Pashtun society. Majority of youth in Pashtun society are living under poverty line and they do not meet the cultural goals through legitimate means. Poverty and relative deprivation carry significant influence on the process of radicalization. It means that relatively pitiable people have more inclination towards radicalization as compared to economically sound people (Freytag *et al.*, 2011; Richards, 2003). Therefore, youth in Pashtun society are more susceptible to radicalization. One of the respondents stated that:

Poor and unemployed youth in Swat were easily attracted to terrorist organizations. Moreover, the people belong to lower class or social status was not happy in this region and they joined the terrorist organizations to take revenge of their deprivation from the rich people. They attacked the property of the rich people or abducted them (individual interview).

Furthermore, Merton (1973) believed that the anomie occurred as a result of discrepancy between the culturally defined goals and means. He believed that social institutions (i.e., family, education, economy, polity) guide individual behaviour. Any kind of discrepancy between goals and means not only leads criminal tendencies in youth but it also increases youth susceptibility towards crimes. Radical people also reject the cultural goals and the idea of attaining them with legitimate means. Then, they develop their own goals and illegitimate means. In the process they legitimize violence for achieving their goals. In Pashtun society, the radical youth legitimize the violent means to achieve their socio-political goals. Moreover, youth in Pashtun society could not accommodate themselves with the speedy socio-economic changes after the emergence of globalization. The people of transitional societies are more susceptible to radicalization (Gold, 2004). Globalization has also brought an ideological polarization which often create identity crises among the youth in Pashtun society. For instance, when the young immigrants from the Europe come back, they cannot accommodate themselves in Pashtun society and educated people feel suffocation. One of the respondents stated that:

The youth after the emergence globalization are anomic and strain condition. The rapid socio-cultural and technological changes have been created identity crisis among the youth of Pashtun. Their exposure created identity crises among

them. These factors often push them towards radicalization. (Khan; personal communication Jan. 23, 2019)

The socio-cultural chaos makes youth susceptible towards radicalization. Youth can be easily manipulated due to current socio-political condition in Pashtun society. Politically and socially, the Pashtun society is instable and the terrorist organizations exploit this situation. The terrorist organizations easily attract youth especially from the socially, culturally, and politically instable society. The Pashtun society remained unstable and this instability cause socio-cultural chaos, which increase youth susceptibility to radicalization. One the respondent stated that:

The socio-cultural distortion and continuous war in Pashtun region increase youth susceptibility towards radicalization. Majority of youth are uncertain about their future and their uncertainty about their future make them more vulnerable towards radicalization. (Jan; personal communication Jan. 1, 2019).

The breakdown of the normative structure, rules, and distortion of societal norms leads anomic condition. As a result of normlessness, society lost control for the social order. Similarly, in Pashtun society the Jirga, cultural values and societal institutions especially family have lost control over maintaining social order in Pashtun society. One of the cultural experts Furad stated that:

Pakhtun culture has lost control to regulate the behaviour of youth. The normative order is not effective and youth are inclined towards crimes. The youth that have criminal tendency can be easily recruited to the terrorist organizations. (Furad; personal communication Jan. 5, 2019).

Moreover, the dissolution of cultural norms and traditions after the advent of globalization also expedite the process of radicalization. Anomic condition not only increase deviancy and crime but also set a stage for radicalization in Pashtun society. Anomic condition can be frequently observed in developing societies, which has been passing from the transitional stages. Resultantly, they face the problem of identity crises and they are not able to differentiate between the good and bad and face a moral dilemma (Angus, 2016). The terrorist can easily recruit people from the transitional societies as compared to stable society (Smelser, 2009). The thematic analysis attest that the current condition that the current anomic and strain condition increase the susceptibility of youth towards radicalization.

5. Conclusion

This article deals with anomic and strain conditions effects on the youth radicalization. For understanding of youth radicalization in Pashtun society, the sociological theories of Robert Merton and Emile Durkheim were used as a theoretical framework to understand the causal factors of youth radicalization. It is revealed that rapid socio-cultural and economic changes after the advent of globalization have been accelerating youth radicalization in Pashtun society. It is concluded that these rapid changes cause normlessness condition, which radicalization can be easily flourished. Moreover, poverty, structural inequality causes strain condition where the youth are unable to achieve their legitimate goals through legitimate means. In spite of anomic and strain, condition youth are also exposed to violent literature and it has significant influence on youth radicalization in Pashtun society. It is one of the areas on which future research can be conducted to see political motive behind the violent literature.

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