

Identity Politics: The Pathway to Growing Extremism

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Introduction

Identity matters a lot in every aspect of what we do and why we do. What differs substantially is the level of perception and the magnitude of awareness of the influence of identity in our life. Though this position is debated at least to the people who have arbitrarily devised ways to prove that they operate beyond a narrow attribution of cultural or normative construct and consider identity as a feeble construct, it is much clear, hence, that their diagnosis of identity induced socio-political junctures must make false reputation of pragmatic importance, though can be academically striking, degenerating a deep rooted identity crisis. Someone struggling to show that he himself is accorded the thing he claims form the society because of what he is as an entity of identity, and solution coming from the opposite direction objecting that since he is claiming on the basis of identify, he should be denied of his social rights further, creates another form of crisis known as legitimacy of ownership crisis for the identity groups.

The influence of globalization, rapid technological growth, reorientation of politics in the line of ideological principles, paralyzed and failing democracies in the developing world and the threat perception and projection based on so called clash of civilization along with the poor economic condition, unemployment and scarcities and vulnerabilities induced form climatic change are posing significant threats to identity and even further proving grounds for newer identity group formation and the externalization of others. The consequent diminution in the level of tolerance and increase in the identity awareness within and outside of cultural characteristics marked by the spread of discriminatory practices induced from globalization and economic growth and so called modernization affecting traditional cultures have made the acceptance and popularity of violent ideas and activities among the growing young people in the developing world possible. Political parties and terrorist organizations clearly identified with religions are opting for greater share making them legitimate stakeholder within the society.

In reaction to all those developments, states are also becoming far more assertive and extreme in terms of maintaining law and order and there is a growth of confrontational politics among the mainstream political parties and the government itself. Far right movements and religious parties are taking the benefits exploiting the condition, where marginalized and deprived community remains silent no longer taking the path of extremism to demand and attain their rights and shares within the community. In short, the identity politics has changed over time and the change is quicker in the post 9/11 world. This paper is intended to show some of the

outcomes of my researches on the changing dynamics of extremism in South Asia in the context of changing socio political structures affecting identity security.

Identity Politics in a Changing World

The identity politics by and large involves a particular form of awareness of oneself as a member of a distinct group often oppressed or deprived of what he claims as his legitimate rights and more importantly the anger associated with that awareness that conform him within that distinct identity group fighting for their rights and demands. Identity politics are political arguments that focus upon the self interest and perspectives of self-identified social groups and ways in which people's politics may be shaped by aspects of their identity through race, class, religion, sexual orientation or traditional dominance. Not all members of any given group are necessarily involved in identity politics. What is crucial about the "identity" of identity politics appears to be the experience of the subject, especially his or her experience of oppression and the possibility of a shared and more authentic or self-determined alternative. Thus identity politics rests on unifying claims about the meaning of politically laden experiences to diverse individuals.¹

On usual terms identity politics are driven by the objectives of obtaining socio-political status or rights while to prevent oppression and discrimination or on the very other hand to justify social belongings and benefits. In the changing face of identity politics, there are two dimensions that are prevalent within the society. Firstly, it involves what I call an egalitarian identity politics that serves as a means to certain socio-political interests and cultural self-rule. The other one is more of preservationist identity politics being a form attributive practice for politico-economic objectives.

The egalitarian identity is the formation of social entities based on identity primacy in order to legitimize their claims and position in the society. Their normative position rather than their role is being used to form the scope of their demands and to justify their stronghold to fight for their demands. It helps associated people to be united and to stay motivated and at the same time to maintain a clear distinction between the "us" and "them" discourse". On the other hand, preservationist identity politics is to do much more to define "them" rather than "us". They attribute certain cultural and ideological distinctions, mostly to indicate the potential contravention in the society. The objective of such politics is to marginalize and separate the very identity group from the people so as to reduce their popularity within their own populace and weaken their acceptability and legitimacy to the exterior actors and populations.

¹ Noonan, H. 2009. "Identity", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2009/entries/identity/>.

In the context of identity's growing role in our politico-economic participation and interaction, it is much relevant to bring the discussion of Manuel Castells on identity formation and identity politics. Castells understands "identity, as it refers to social actors," as "the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or related set of cultural attributes, that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning."² Unlike "roles" (e.g., worker, mother), which are defined by "norms structured by the institutions and organizations of society," identities (e.g., gay, Latino, feminist) "are sources of meaning for the actors themselves, and by themselves, constructed through a process of individuation"³. Identities and roles can coincide, he points out, but "in simple terms, identities organize the meaning while roles organize the functions" of individuals in society. What is important here is that identity primarily gives meaning to the social actors at the same time this meaning intensify their roles and extremism therefore is a very probable outcome of identity construction.

Castells conceptually distinguishes three forms and origins of identity building. Legitimizing identity is "introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination vis-à-vis social actors." An example is the identity of citizen confined to political actions within the limits of established state power. Resistance identity is "generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society." Examples include religious fundamentalism and queer culture enclaves that involve the "exclusion of the excluders by the excluded." Castells believes this "may be the most important type of identity-building in our society." Finally, although rare, project identity formation occurs "when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure."⁴ Castells gives the example of feminists who move beyond the defensive stance of women's identity and women's rights to "challenge patriarchalism, thus the patriarchal family, thus the entire structure of production, reproduction, sexuality, and personality on which societies have been historically based."⁵

The political analysis should focus more on "problematic of identity" rather than about "identity" itself as discussed by Robert Bailey. Problematic of identity is "the ongoing dialogue between

² Castells, M. 1997. *The Power of Identity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, p.6.

³ Ibid, p.7.

⁴ DeLeon, R. E. "Urban Regimes and Identity Politics: Some Theoretical Bridges", retrieved from <http://bss.sfsu.edu/naff/Diversity/DeLeon%20Draft%20Chapter%20Identity%20and%20Regime.pdf>

⁵ Castells, M. 1997. Op cit, p.9.

the social constructions of identity "always takes place in a context marked by power relationships,"⁶. Since the forms of identity, both as outlined by me and by Manuel Castells and the objectives championed by those groups have both ideological meaning and functional gravity, identity politics is likely to create a two way extremist manifestation: from identity groups themselves and from the stakeholders who are frightened by the identity groups growth and power. State sponsor terrorism is an appropriate example of such politics.

What is new here is the diminution in the level of tolerance and increase in the identity awareness within and outside of cultural characteristics marked by the spread of discriminatory practices induced from globalization and economic growth such as unemployment, inequality, and so called modernization affecting traditional cultures and civilizational or cultural clash orientation in the psychological preoccupation and politico-economic practices in the society. The point of divergence of modern society with identity politics is that Identity politics is illiberal, that is, it is particularist⁷ in the gradually grooming pluralistic societies even in the developing world. Though it can create confusion with the interest groups but identity groups focus more on resistance unlike interest groups which deal with persuasion. Therefore, unlike any other group formation, identity politics is the most likely to fuel extremism to a violent scale.

Now, who are getting the benefit out of identity politics is a fundamental problem. The intent of the identity politics in this changed world, what I call the interest regime of the identity politics, is manifold with multiple dividing lines and with incompatible objectives. On the egalitarian identity politics, the preservationist religion has become an egalitarian religionism. In the post 9/11 identity politics, religion has become a major factor in defining the course of identity based group formation and mobilization. Political parties and terrorist organizations clearly identified with religions are opting for greater share making them legitimate stakeholder within the society. On the other hand, secular stakeholders are in resistance to exclude right wingers or Islamists from the mainstream politics and alienate them from the society. Religious leaders, secular authorities and even the national government are taking the benefit of identity politics; unlike the past where only identity groups have the major benefits.

Ethnic groups' struggle for autonomy remain still strong and in addition conflict over scarce resource, climate induced vulnerabilities, socio-economic problems are changing the nature of ethnic conflicts from politics to religion, resource, climate change or marginalization and

⁶ Bailey, R.W. 1999. *Gay Politics, Urban Politics: Identity and Economics in the Urban Setting*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press.

⁷ Stanley Fish, , 2008, February 17. "When 'Identity Politics' Is Rational", *the New York Times the opinion pages*. Retrieved from <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/when-identity-politics-is-rational/>

deprivation. The stake of the modern capitalists in the identity politics is not less notable including market benefit from culture or tradition induced demand and consumption, exploitation of class struggle and using a similar stage to obtain their objectives as interest groups. Identity politics on the preservationist part brings the benefit of societal or power stability in favor of the existing status quo. The state extremism, indiscriminate actions against particular identity groups such as war on terror and anti-Islamic radicalization into the mainstream politics and the growth of far rights are the inadvertent outcomes of the preservationist identity politics. For international community, it is about systemic stability and the division of nations into the lines of civilizational clash identities is helping to operate the world *modus operandi*.

In the discussion over new trends in the political extremism, I will give details of the newly drawing lines of extremism within the discourse of identity politics and will give some examples particularly from South Asian context.

Changes in the Socio-Economic and Cultural Structures and Threat to Identity Security

With the changes in the socio-economic and political structures, identity politics gets newer dimensions that are threatening identity security substantially. Firstly, globalization along with growing cultural awareness and differentiation, information and communication technology, and social network is the most striking factor in affecting identity security leading to formation and socialization of identity politics in South Asia. The major forces of globalization that are affecting identity politics include cultural awareness of distinctiveness, indiscriminate modernization of traditional culture, secularization vs. indigenization of political culture, transnationalism and regionalism, economic marginalization, immigration and flow of arms and drugs, cyber crimes and external interference with the regional and national politics such as of war on terror on Pakistan and so on.

From a socio-cultural perspective, globalization exercises a permeating effect on building the relationships between and among various locales. Places become 'closer' to each other as time and space tend to compress due to the advances of technology and mass media: the most distanced places are easy to access, and the world seems smaller. In this sense, it is the leading factor contributing to the de-centering and dislocation of identities. Due to the spread of mass communication and exacerbating pace of development of relationships in the various spheres of life, as an individual becomes more and more involved in the process of increasing 'mutuality' of the world and finds himself submerged in a great number of various dialogues and debates, he

is exposed to the widest variety of opinions and viewpoints, often contradictory and hardly reconcilable. This has a direct impact on his identity in the form of multiple sources of pervasive influence; it becomes more complicated to stick to one or several distinctive identities since in order to do so it is necessary for an individual to have a reference group, which confirms and buttresses his identity. With the increase in the number of such groups originating from various cultural backgrounds, carrying various values and articulating various norms, possessing different abilities concerning de-coding the messages one is trying to convey as constitutive part of his/her identity, identity becomes more vulnerable to the influence of the external forces and more difficult to affirm. In other words, not only the relationship between people and happenings transform, but the identities of people also undergo dramatic changes.

What globalization had definitely contributed to was the erosion of the 'master identities' such as, for example, citizenship in the abstract meaning of membership in the territorially defined and state-governed society, and its replacement by an identity based on ethnicity, race, local community, language, and other 'local' and culturally concrete forms. In other words, the trends towards unification that were exacerbating during the past decades in turn provoked the appreciation of the role and importance of the opposing trend – towards the specific and the local.⁸ "Deterritorializing" character of globalization is accused of diminishing the significance of locality in cultural experience. That is in turn helping to emerge reactive identity politics socializing rigidity of cultures and identities at the institutional level, which is in contradiction with their inherent fluidity & instability attuned to the flow of globalization.

Secondly, governmental policies in South Asian countries particularly in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, have accentuated the extremist trend in all these states. Governments, in these countries, whether civil or military, have used the religion and ethnic card, in order to prolong and strengthen their rule, further strengthening the fundamentalists and extremists in the society.⁹ Many of the ruling parties are known to have links with the extremist elements and have covertly supported them, as well as used them to create violence for conducting manipulative politics. Each South Asian state manifests the impact of mal-governance in one way or another.

⁸ Castells, M. 2006. "Globalisation and identity A comparative perspective, transfer". Retrieved from http://www.osi.hu/nsp/program_uk/yorkconf/papers2001/GlobalizationandIdentity.htm

⁹ Nasir, S. 2004, October. "Rise of Extremism in South Asia", IPRI PAPER 7, Islamabad: Asia Printers. Retrieved from <http://ipripak.org/papers/riseofextremism.shtml>

Thirdly, Islamization of politics particularly in Pakistan and Bangladesh has crucial effect in the growth of extremism in South Asia. Pakistan, during the Zia regime, in the period 1977 to 1988 was under his Islamization policies. These tendencies were further developed in the decade of 1990s, when a historically unprecedented growth in poverty combined with an undermining of democratic institutions. Bangladesh is also witnessing the consequences of the Gen. Zia-ur-Raman's politicization of religion, which eventually led to the surfacing of the Jamat-i-Islami. Religion as a political weapon is becoming more and more influential in politics as well as in society. Similar trends are visible in Sri Lanka and Nepal, where government policies instead of dealing with the lack of human security have used the deprived class, using religion and ethnic identities to consolidate their hold and same card is used by the opponent political forces.¹⁰

Fourthly, and most importantly insecurities from the deteriorating economic condition cause a major threat to identity security and increase the potential of extremism in both ethnic and politico-economic dimension. Poor economic growth in the region, led to the problems of mass unemployment, hunger and malnutrition, health problems and income inequality all of which are growing and alongside the increase in population growth. The key human development indicators show a dismal picture of the region. South Asia's share in world's adult population in year 2001 was 22 per cent, while its share in world's adult illiteracy by year 2000 was 50 per cent. The region is among the most illiterate regions with over 614 million illiterate adults, and also most malnourished with around 50 per cent of the region's children under the age of 5 years are malnourished. During the period of 1990-2001, 32.2 per cent of the total population of the region lives under poverty line with less than \$1 a day.¹¹ The multi-dimensional profile of poverty and human development index had a far-reaching impact on the society and its behavior. South Asia has become a breeding ground of crime and violence and with increasing insecurity and vulnerability; the competing interests have pitted caste and communal groups against each other. The economic inequalities and deprivation has created frustration and insecurity among the masses, leading to an increasing criminalization of society in which there are available targets for exploitation by the extremist elements in and outside governments.¹²

Fifthly, the external interference and the war on terror are also major contributing factor in the changing socio-cultural belief and value structure within South Asia leading to identity insecurities and resultant extremism in both ethnic and religious dimensions. The extremist trends have been boosted in the South Asian countries due to the interference by the extra-

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Shar, M. 2009, august 22. "Causes of extremism in South Asia-Pakistan", *CSS Forum*. Retrieved from <http://www.cssforum.com.pk/general/news-articles/26177-causes-extremism-south-asia-pakistan.html>

regional and neighboring countries in the internal affairs of the states. The outside powers have either supported the governments or a particular communal or ethnic group or extremist elements, in pursuit of their interests. And this has been a major factor affecting South Asian politics since the early years of these states. Most of the ethnic movements in South Asia are cross-border and inter-related, exacerbating the intensity of these movements. Like the Tamil rebels group in Sri Lanka, is known to have links and has received support and been sponsored by the Indian government and the ethnic Tamil population in India. Similarly the Maoist in Nepal is known to have collaboration and sponsorship from India. The Kashmiri separatist movement in India has received support from the Pakistan.

Extra-regional actors have also played an important role in accelerating extremism in the region. To counter Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, the United States supported and sponsored the Pakistani government and also the Jihadi groups during the period 1979-1989, which in post-1990 period became a threat for the security and stability of Pakistan¹³. The so called "War on Terror" today is also responsible for growing extremism particularly in Pakistan, due to misperceived international policies of the national government of Pakistan supporting US mission in Afghanistan.

Sixthly, the demographics of South Asia suggests that it is the huge and mounting proportion of youth who will be the sufferer of such instability and insecurity at the same time they will be playing the key role in deciding their future course in terms of promoting and sustaining peace in South Asia. Youth ages 10-24 represent the largest number of young people ever to transition in South Asia, being the home to over 400 million young people ages 10-24, making up 31 percent of the region's population. In India alone, the second most populous country in the world, there are 330 million young people in this age group. The advent of 21st century era of youth along with the new media revolution, it is high demanding that youth is in the foremost role in social engagement and nation building, creating a strong base for regional and international cooperation. Middle East has just experienced the rise of young people in defending their rights and freedoms in support of peace and stability.

Seventhly, changes in the cognitive structures such as the growing fight between nationalism and religion is another factor that working towards radicalized societies in South Asia. Radicalization stems from the changing solidarity among the people of particular ethnicity or religion. The influence of religion in the daily lives of general is decreasing day by day. Their loyalty to the religious dogmatism has rather turned to an anti-dogmatic stance what can be termed as anti-fundamentalists radicalization in South Asian Muslim society. In the case of Bangladesh, the identity retreat and identity confusion over whether primarily as Muslim as

¹³ Nasir, S. 2004, Op cit.

Bengali has divided people into divergent strata few fundamentally oriented with Islam and most others is having an antipathy towards extremist's interpretation of religion favoring religion over nationalism. In the post-independence decades no South Asian state has been able to resolve the dilemma in the relationship between religion and politics. Rather the crisis is getting severe because of the inability of states to establish stable governance, and create sustainable economic conditions, giving the extremist elements chance of taking advantage of the situation. Pakistan till today is facing the crisis of determining a relationship between the state and the religion, often leading to crisis of governance. This confusion has helped political parties to take advantage of the situation according to their respective interests.

Finally, Migration and human capital export have increased far greater than any another times of history making anti-immigrants movement emerge as a newer source of social and political stability. This marks another dimension of the internal security problems of the regional states. Along with immigration, the proliferation of small arms alongside the menace of drug trafficking and narco-terrorism are also affecting identity politics. Each of these issues has significant trans-national dimensions. This feature not only complicates the situation for the respective countries but also negatively affects the inter-state relations.

Emerging Strategic Trends in Identity Politics and New Faces of Political Extremism

1. Confrontational Politics and Political Violence

Confrontational nature of politics is a looming source of extremism among the mainstream political activists particularly among BNP, Awami League and Jamaat Islami activists. As a result of the lack of consensus, politico-historical legacy of confrontation and divergent policy choices of both government and opposition, Bangladesh's parliament has gone through lengthy periods of complete dysfunction, including through opposition boycotts. Identity debate over Bengali vs. Bangladeshi nationalism among the major two parties in Bangladesh added much salience to the dysfunction and political consensus among the political elites of the country.

Personal enmity between political leaders, corruption, criminality and organized violence, taking place in a context of consistent human rights violations, have corroded Bangladesh's political culture. The police have a poor reputation and there are concerns about the accountability and impartiality of the Rapid Action Battalion paramilitary force. This fragmentation within the political spectrum of Bangladesh has resulted into violent demonstration, hartal, police attack, torture and, unwarranted political imprisonment, disappearance or assassination of the member

of political opposition. Most importantly, Bangladesh's dysfunctional politics have created space for radical Islamist groups¹⁴:

- Islamist parties are seen as being cleaner and more dedicated, driven and effective than mainstream parties. They are active in building support bases through work in local communities.
- Bangladesh's Islamist groups do not have identical programs. However, elements of their social and political programs include pushing for Sharia law, pressuring or attacking minorities and expanding Islamic education.
- Islamist groups in Bangladesh, ranging from governing parties to banned jihadi organizations, share certain common approaches, but also differ in several key respects. The nature of the relationships between groups is often obscure.
- Circumstantial evidence, as well as cold political logic, suggests that those in power have cultivated and sheltered underground Islamist terrorist groups. There are also concerns about the external links and financing of Islamist groups.

2. Right Wing Extremism

Like Europe, South Asia is infested with the growth of right wing extremism and their violent path of demonstration. Many recent developments like the tragedy in Norway where Anders Behring Breivik, dressed in police uniform shot dead at least 84 people at a youth summer camp of Norway's ruling political party, hours after a bomb killed seven in the government district in the capital Oslo¹⁵ is symptomatic of a growing culture of politically motivated violence induced from far-right ideology across different regions of the world that has potential of wider security implications for international peace and stability. This has made the relationship between far-right extremism and political violence suddenly as a top political and security concern.

The growth of extreme right may push countries into right-wing radicalization in line of anti-immigrant violence, racial discrimination, cross-ethnic conflict and demise of multiculturalism. More violence may soon follow just like as Europe around the world including South and South East Asia due to both mounting intolerance and hatred against Muslim population and Muslim immigrants. The consequent portrait will not be pleasing in any sense. There will be civil unrest and political instability having a potential of state collapse and even interstate-conflict. All well established norms and institutions of governance will be under intense stress. Since terrorism of

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, 2008, 'Bangladesh Today', *Asia Report 121*, International Crisis Group

¹⁵ Gibbs, W. and Ringstrom, A. 2011, Jul 23. "At least 91 dead in Norway shooting, bomb attack", *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSTRE76L2VI20110723>

any kind has multiplier effects, the society will face the rise of other extreme occurrence such as segregation, mass slaughter and the rise of violent groups from the Muslim as well.

Another major signal from the rise of right wing extremism is that the next wave of will come not from al-Qaeda-inspired groups, but rather rightwing groups that want to respond to this threat and reassert their position against Muslim immigration. Therefore, terrorism will now show new dimension being connected to people that are not only 'kidnapping' Islam but Hinduism, Christianity or any other religion. Like al Qaeda, far-right terrorists often see themselves as vanguards that will awaken the masses.

One of the examples of rising rightwing terrorism in India is with Saffron, or Hindutva right wingers. Saffron right wingers in India claim that Hindus are the most tolerant and peaceful people – and then smoothly go on to proclaim that all other religions are evil, especially the Abrahamic Religions. They also vent their fury on Atheists and Intellectuals. Muslims become evil slime balls with green goo for blood and "Urban Elites" are weak-kneed party goers who've lost touch with reality and only get knowledge by thinking in armchairs.

Besides, mainstream politics in many countries are being increasingly adopting chauvinism, anti-Islamism and other forms of racism in their political programs, and reconciling themselves with far-right parties. What they all have in common is that they use the issue of immigration and Islam to motivate and mobilize frustrated people.¹⁶ The media contribute to this right-wing development by boosting right-wing preachers of hate. From Scandinavia to the Mediterranean, the last few months have seen an increase in anti-immigrant, specifically anti-Muslim, policies and a backlash against ethnic minorities reflected in electoral breakthroughs for the far-right in the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, France, and Italy. The growth of this new brand of extremism has been the result of indifference and inadequate effort to curb the growth of extreme right within the mainstream society. Until now, many countries and their security services had focused almost exclusively on the threat from al-Qaida-inspired terrorism. Rightwing extremist groups and their more violent affiliates were dismissed as a disorganized, fragmented and irrelevant movement.

3. Political Misuse of Youth

In Bangladesh, political misuse of youth particularly criminalized nature of student politics provides one of the major sources of violent extremism among youths who are being habituated with the culture of using violence into political spectrum in Bangladesh. Students are

¹⁶ Fekete, L. 2006. "Enlightened fundamentalism? Immigration, feminism and the Right", *Race & Class*, Vol. 48 (2): 1–22

being used as party wings to demonstrate muscle power. The political parties, devoid of sound theories and pragmatism of politics, deliberately nourish and patronize unhealthy student politics only for their vested interest, setting aside the greater interest of the nation.¹⁷ Violent intra-group and inter groups clashes among student political wings and their practices of intolerance has introduced extremism and violence in the main stream political activities in Bangladesh.

Since misuse of youth becomes a synonym for hooliganism, hijacking, extortion, robbery, they are prone to violence and to accept radical ideologies. They are also both the cause and result of dysfunctional politics and intolerant political behavior with and from the opposition parties. After independence, dozens of students and non-students have been murdered in educational institutions due to campus violence triggered by venomous political parties' student wings. After the 9th parliamentary election, anarchy in the educational institutions seems to be an everyday affair. Higher educational institutions are closed sine die for violence and vandalism created by different sections of student wings. The universities are turning into a battle field with mediaeval barbarism to kill or cause grievous hurt to fellow students.

4. Extreme State Machinery in Law and Order

The maintenance of law and order is the key responsibility of the government. While it is supposed to eliminate radical elements from the society, it has turned into a window of human rights violation and so called state sponsored terrorism. In South Asia it is now widely seen that there is a rising extremism within the political governance structure which is becoming intolerant and violent in terms of preserving law and order. The identity perception that allowed them to policing the civilians in violent way is determined in terms of over exaggerated hold of political responsibility and law and order maintenance.

Major law enforcing agencies including Bangladesh Police, RAB and other detective branches are being used as a tool of oppression on protesting voices. Recent event stream suggest that, ruling political government is not only using law enforcing agencies against its opposition, but also using mercilessly against general people. British daily Guardian has reported a policeman is beating under-aged children in a protest of garments workers against low pay. The RAB, composed of elite members of the army and navy, was formed in March 2004 to target the armed criminal gangs and extortion rackets operating in many parts of Bangladesh. Its officers, clad in pitch-black uniforms with bandannas and mirror shades, soon became a common—and

¹⁷ Mukta, K. M. 2009, April 8 "Unhealthy student politics: Impediment to development", *Financial Express*. Retrieved from <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2009/04/08/63347.html>

imposing—fixture on the streets of Dhaka, earning a reputation for ruthless efficiency. RAB committed its first extrajudicial killing on the fifth day of its operations in 2004. Since then they are operating with impunity. According to a recent report by Amnesty International, the force has been responsible for the unlawful killing of 'at least' 700 people since its inception. Despite promises by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to halt extrajudicial killings when she came to power in early 2009, Amnesty claims at least 200 deaths have occurred on her watch. RAB officers accused of human rights violations have remained outside the purview of law.¹⁸

5. Instrumental Use of Religion and Religious Extremism

The instrumental use of religion is the most striking aspect of identity politics particularly in the post 9/11 world. Religion is increasingly seen as an important aspect of identity by Muslims, it is deployed in many different and diverse ways. For example, in some cases it is shaped by, and has developed in response to, experiences of racism and discrimination; in others it can be a resource to negotiate parental and community pressures. The politics of identity can be a trigger for wider civil and political participation, and thus support integration. At the same time, an Islamic discourse can be used to support isolation and resist integration. Having placed identity politics in this broader role, the paper then examines the relationship between identity and radicalization. It finds that the search for identity plays an important role in radicalization. It notes that the discourse of 'European/British-Islam' is emerging as a powerful response to 'radical Islam.' Thus, whilst Muslim identity politics may contribute to violent radicalization, it can also be a significant tool for challenging such processes.¹⁹

There are *five* key points that emerge from the review of the current research literature. *First*, the path to radicalization often involves a search for identity at a moment of crisis. Whilst defining oneself is part of the normal process of identity formation among young people, for those who are at risk of violent radicalization, this process creates a 'cognitive opening', a moment when previous explanations and belief systems are found to be inadequate in explaining an individual's experience. *Second*, underlying the identity crisis is a sense of not being accepted or belonging to society. The intensity of such feelings is reinforced by experiences of discrimination and racism, a sense of blocked social mobility; and a lack of confidence in the British political system. *Third*, as part of this process individuals seek to construct a sense of what it means to be Muslim in Britain today. The appeal of extremist groups reflects, in part, the failure of traditional

¹⁸ Bangladesh's Troubling Death Squad, 2011, September 16. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <http://the-diplomat.com/2011/09/16/bangladesh%E2%80%99s-troubling-death-squad/>

¹⁹ Choudhury, T. 2007, April . "The Role of Muslim Identity Politics in Radicalisation" *Communities and Local Government of the University of Durham*, London: Eland House, Bressenden Place. Retrieved from <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/452628.pdf>

religious institutions and organizations to connect with young people and address their questions and concerns. *Fourth*, a lack of religious literacy and education appears to be a common feature among those that are drawn to such groups. The most vulnerable are those who are religious novices exploring their faith for the first time. *Fifth*, the discourse of 'European/British-Islam' is emerging as a powerful response to 'radical Islam'. Thus, whilst the politics of identity plays a in the radicalization process, it remains an important tool for de-radicalization.²⁰

The inspiration for the spread of Islamization in India's neighborhood has come from state policies that sought refuge and utility in religion, and drew inspiration from Wahabbi influences outside its own borders. At the same time, in tackling the menace of growing Islamist extremism and terror, we must recognise the following facts.

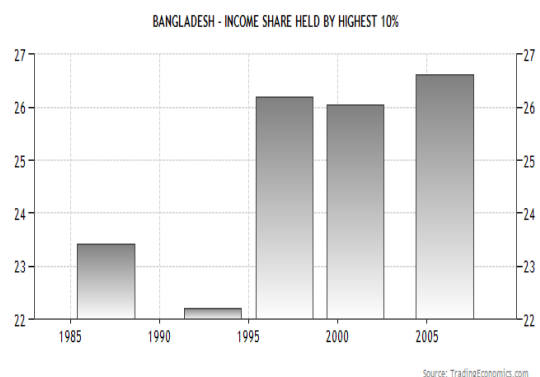
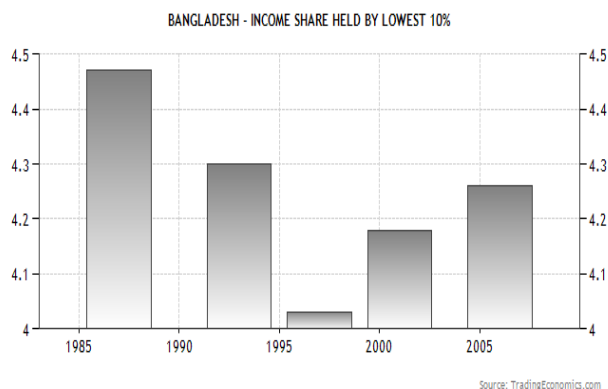
- Islam has to be respected and understood for its mobilizing force, latent power, perseverance and theological indestructibility.
- There is a section in the Muslim world which does not consider Osama bin Laden as a cleric but as a folk hero. To many of his followers, Osama bin Laden is a man of faith, intellectual honesty, courage and integrity.
- This folk hero has had the motivation and the determination to calmly, clearly and articulately express his hatred for America and its friends/allies and, with equal calm, affirm his determination to either destroy these countries one by one, or die trying.²¹

6. Elite vs. Non Elite: Dormant Radicalization

It is become a norm in the identity politics that differentiation particularly along the line of economic and social status serves to be one of the fundamental sources of identity formation. What is new in this regard is the dormant nature of radicalization within the poor non-elite majority of the people who are getting pissed off because of the growing inequality in the society and the discriminatory economic and social benefits accorded to the elite class snatching form the lower class share of the property. The economy is becoming more like an enclave economy where people identified based on class-struggle and economic exploitation are becoming radical and showing sometimes violently their concerns and grievances.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Sood, V. "Radical Islam in South Asia and Implications for the Region", p-45. Retrieved from <http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/html/paper/pdf/vikram.pdf>



One example of such kind of radicalization is violent expression of the victims of the repeated stock market failure in Dhaka Stock Exchange. Hundreds of angry investors took to the street after biggest one-day fall in its 55-year history of Dhaka Stock Exchange. The protests disrupted traffic in front of the Dhaka Stock Exchange while the angry people piled up papers and set those on fire in front of the regulatory Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) chanting anti-government slogans and prompting interventions of baton wielding policemen. Over three million people - many of them small-scale individual investors - have lost money because of the plunging share prices. Vehicles were vandalised and bonfires were lit at traffic intersections.²² And such examples are a regular phenomenon in Dhaka city today and what driving investors to create violence is their perception that some government supported big investors are responsible for that and they are taking the right share of the small scale investors illegally.

7. Climate Radicalization and Climate Change Bringing Ethnic Conflict at the Fore Front

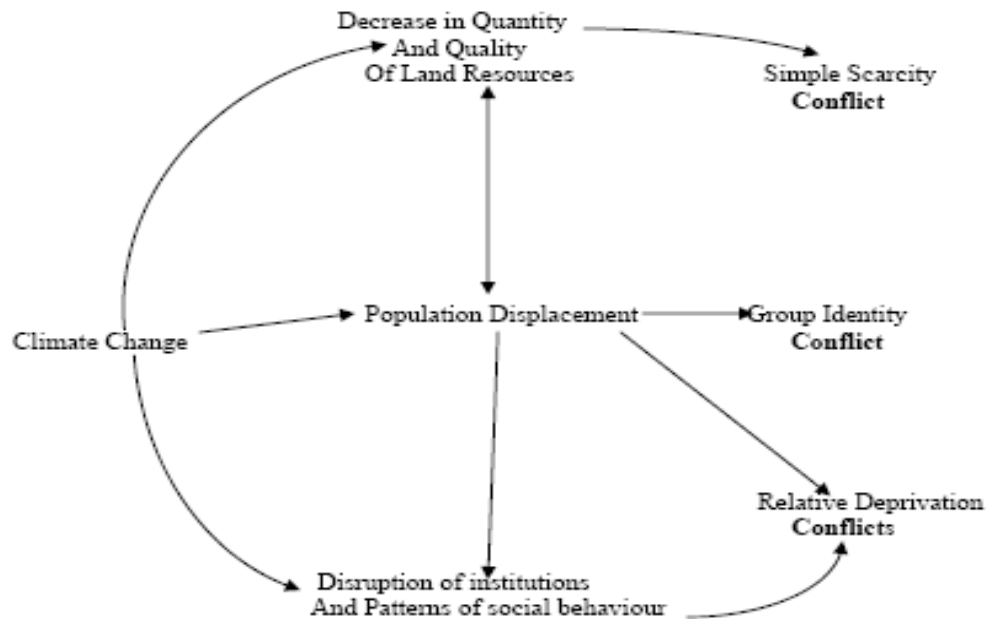
The decreasing availability of physical, environmental and land resources such as clean water, good agricultural land for arable and animal husbandry could create a condition of "simple scarcity", "group identity" and "deprivation" in the area²³, that could provoke violent conflicts of high magnitude due to population movements and scramble for the available resources.

Radicalization and terrorism may increase in many developing societies particularly in South Asia due to the climate induced social and economic deprivation. When a government can no longer deliver services to its people, conditions are ripe for the extremists and terrorists to fill the vacuum. The Rohingyas of Myanmar is a very relevant example of how marginalized people get involved in radicalization and subsequently to terrorism. Climate change could potentially

²² Bangladesh stock market fall: Clashes hit Dhaka, 2011, 10 January, *BBC Business News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-12149340>

²³ Homer-Dixon, T. 1994. *Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases*. Toronto: University of Toronto.

trigger large-scale displacement and migration from one region to other in search of new avenues for employment and settlement. The 2001 World Disasters Report estimated of 25 million current “environmental refugees”.



Source: Homer-Dixon, 1994²⁴

Reduced agricultural productivity and the resultant situation of food insecurity is potentially the most worrying consequence of climate change. Such impacts are particularly severe in developing regions such as South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa. This situation can undermine the economic performance of weak and unstable states, thereby encouraging or aggravating destabilization, the collapse of social systems and violent conflicts. Resource scarcity has the potential to be a contributing factor to conflict and instability. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda was in many ways a consequence of squabbles over agricultural resources. The 1974 Nigerian coup resulted largely from an insufficient response to famine. Situation in Darfur, which had land resources at its root, is increasingly spilling over into neighboring Chad. The United Nations estimates 300 potential conflicts over water exist around the world today.

Ethnic conflict seems to be common in all countries of the world where people are divided into separate ethnic groups, that may have a racial, national, linguistic, tribal, religious or caste basis. The members of an ethnic group tend to favor their group members over non-members because they are more related to their group members than to outsiders. This disposition to favor kin over non-kin becomes important in social life and politics when people and groups of

²⁴ Ibid

people have to compete for scarce resources. What is different and even new in terms of changing identity politics is the influence of climate change as an instigator of ethnic divisions bringing the ethnic conflict at the fore front. Two patterns climate change induced ethnic conflict would have potential to penetrate the present lines of ethnic conflicts: (1) significant climatic hazards will lead to growing conscience of ethnic divisions and ethnic competition for the hold of resources threatened by the climatic consequences; and (2) the more a society is facing scarcity of resources and climate induced vulnerabilities, the more political and other interest conflict tend to become channeled into ethnic lines.

8. Misperceived International Policy

The formation particular identity groups are being influenced by the misperceived international policy as well. When the policies of the national government particularly with regard to its decision to cooperate with the outside pressure, such as the case of Musharraf in Pakistan to help the United States in its invasion in Afghanistan in 2001, lead to a perception by the definite identity groups such as religious groups in Pakistan that the Government is having an anti-religious stance helping the enemies, it is a very provable source of political extremism in today's Muslim World. In the Middle East, specifically Iraq, and Central Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan) such misperception could be responsible for the rise in international terrorism considering, for example these two regions had an increase of approximately 1,500 terrorist incidents in 2010 in comparison to 2009. Who is indirectly to blame for this misperception is the United States who is responsible for some of today's terrorist activities in the Middle East and Central Asia bringing the Muslim countries within its alliance for so called Global War on Terror.

9. The Esoteric Appeal of Violent Ideologies and Intellectual Radicalization

Along with the exoteric appeal (popular support) for the radical ideas, now there is a significant development in the esoteric appeal of extremism among the intellectuals fascinated with religious fundamentalism. With a higher level of modern western education and acquaintance with the secular philosophies, many intellectual and upper class people are resorting to the religion in terms of taking position in favor of radical ideas and writing in their favor and even being involved into the radical groups. Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh (HT-B) which is a part of the global Sunni political party that aspires to establish Khilafat by uniting all Islamic countries is an example of such radicalization. Most of the frontline leaders of HT-B are university teachers with North American PhDs and the supporter base is from talented university students. Hizb ut-Tahrir has three clear goals: to establish a community of like-minded Hizb ut-Tahrir members in host states, to sway public opinion in one or more host states to facilitate change of government,

and, finally, to establishment a new government that will implement Islamic laws.²⁵ HT's Bangladesh unit has been under scanner for quite some time, branded as banned outfit and presently Bangladesh authority is probing HT-B's suspected involvement with proscribed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and any other forms of terrorism in the country and elsewhere. Following September 18 arrests, HT threatened to oust the government by launching a countrywide movement. The threat was issued at a HT-B meeting in Dhaka in clear contravention of the state of emergency in the country. Tahrir is also against participating in elections as it views elections are contrary to Shariah law.²⁶

10. *Identicide and Radicalization*

The strategy of identicide seeks to destroy libraries, cemeteries, families, sacred places, monuments, and landmarks despite the international laws and standards which aim to eliminate, or in the least, mitigate, such war practices.²⁷ In the identity politics, the growing tendency to weaken and to make certain identity groups peter out is affecting political extremism considerably. Such was the case in the former Yugoslavia where civilians and their lived-in places became targets of enemy fire. Enemies understood the importance of places of identity and how their intentional targeting could weaken individuals and groups. In South Asia, the state sponsored activities such as those in Pakistan and India against particular identity groups, though in low scale, have particular relevance to identicides. The separatist movements and ethnic extremism all have a reactive element either the experienced or perceived threat of identicides by the majoritarian politics in South Asia. The demand for autonomy and other forms of radical ethnic and sometimes religious demands are induced from the reaction to identicides.

11. *Radicalization from Extreme Deprivation and Marginalization*

We all know that a hungry man is an angry man. But if a hungry man continues being hungry having his family in hunger too for a long time, his anger can't be confined to just mere anger rather it becomes violent or even ferocious. It does happen and in real, extremism can take its root not much better than it can by exploiting this situation.

²⁵ Bhattacharjee, J. "Understanding 12 extremist groups of Bangladesh". Retrieved from www.observerindia.com/.../Bangladesh-Militant-Groups_1246945884723.pdf

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Meharg, S. J. 2006, November. "Identicide Precursor to Genocide" Working Paper 05, *Centre for Security and Defence Studies*. Ottawa: Norman Paterson School of International Affairs Carleton University. Retrieved from http://www.carleton.ca/csds/docs/working_papers/MehargWP05.pdf

Accordingly, a notable form of extremism comes from the extreme deprivation and marginalization where people have the view that they are denied of their rights and facilities by the state while particular segment of the society is enjoying the most of the opportunities in the country. The ability of the state to deliver welfare, services, and justice through its administrative and judicial organs is critical to maintaining the loyalty of the population and thus the legitimacy of the government. If this mechanism breaks down, there is danger of marginalized groups resorting to violence, including terrorism²⁸. Much of the left-wing violence in India and Nepal originated in this sort of neglect.

In the northern districts of Bangladesh, for example, there is a growing tendency towards extremism and violence and the rise of terrorist's organizations capitalizing extreme poverty and marginalization. Extreme ideologies have always bigger appeal to poor masses. Hence, Maoist insurgencies did not allow us to conclude that it is not true in the northern districts of Bangladesh as much as in the North-East India.

The northern regions of Bangladesh are extremely poor. Food insecurity in Bangladesh mostly affects the segments of the population that are heavily dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. The poverty in this region is often attributed to a phenomenon called Monga, a seasonal food insecurity primarily caused by an income and unemployment deficit. Monga has forced poor people either to borrow money from usurers at an excessively high interest or to sell their labor in advance at an unusually low rate to keep their families from starvation. Many people have sold their meager produce of aman crops well before harvesting to tide over the acute shortage of employment and food.

Poverty and hunger is manifested in a number of forms in Bangladesh; foremost are the malnutrition, violence; however, joblessness and prolonged working hours are the reasons of hunger. What drives them to extremists' frontier is their perceptual identity as deprived and marginalized community. They think that it is a result of historical injustice and denial of rights resulted in the human degradation and barrier to access the fruits of justice. It considers the entire issue as a result of politics and power tilted against the poor. The privileged class of Bangladesh has always benefited at the cost of the disadvantaged. As a result, over the years the rich have become increasingly richer and the marginalized increasingly deprived. According to government statistics, the share of the national income of the richest 5 percent of the families of Bangladesh increased from 18.85 percent in 1991-92 to 23.62 percent in 1995-96 and then to 30.66 percent in 2000.

²⁸ Balachandran, V. Insurgency, Terrorism, and Transnational Crime in South Asia, p.115. Retrieved from www.stimson.org/images/uploads/research-pdfs/Stimson_ch6_1.pdf

However, radicalization based on marginalization induced identity perception results into different extreme implications in the Northern districts of Bangladesh:

1. Most likely to join extremists or terrorists organizations such as Maoists, JMJB, JMB, Hraktual Jihad and so on.
2. Involved into crimes, drug trafficking, human trafficking and forced labor
3. Popularity and wider acceptance of radical ideologies
4. Violent forms of reactions and expression of their demands

12. Long-term Status as Identity less Group and Radicalization

A different pattern of identity induced ambience creating the atmosphere for violent extremism is seen in the case of stateless Rohingyas in Bangladesh. More than 26,000 Rohingya refugees are living in Bangladesh as both stateless and identity less community in a miserable condition. The camps, where they live, are in a shocking condition and host to some of the most appalling, unhygienic and poor situations. Many women have lost their husbands, mothers their sons; and children are often without proper education. Depression is palpable everywhere; but so too is anger, resentment and a readiness to face even death if this means to escape such a miserable and unjust life.

Yet Rohingya have very few choices and possibilities. This is also true in the case of education, which is mainly religious and in Bangladeshi madrasas. The religious teaching in these madrasas is at the best very traditional and at worst dangerous for the education and formation of frustrated and poor new generations of displaced Rohingya Muslims. Radical groups are targeting and exploiting the desperate reality of these people. Rohingya refugee camps become a prolific breeding ground for future extremists and possibly even cheap terrorists.²⁹ Al Qaeda had reportedly recruited Rohingyas from refugee camps in southeastern Bangladesh to fight in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Chechnya.

The Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) represents over 120,000 Rohingyas in Bangladesh. The Rohingya also speak the same language as Bangladeshis from the Chittagong area. These "destitute and stateless people" have been open to recruitment to various militant Islamist groups. The RSO has reportedly received support from the Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh.

²⁹ Islam, M. 2009, February 3. "Rohingya Muslims and injustice: a security issue?" *Muslims, and an Anthropologist*. Retrieved from <http://marranci.wordpress.com/2009/02/03/rohingya-muslims-and-injustice-a-security-issue/>

Afghan instructors are reported to have been seen in RSO camps.³⁰ Others worry that armed extremist gangs are radicalizing the youth of this marginalized, leaderless community, and suspicions of drug smuggling and an increase in petty crime in the camps have been recorded in the local press.³¹

13. The State of Confused Identity

Identity confusion can be another newly developing source of violent extremism in South Asia in particular as it happens with Wahabi vs. Sunni dilemma among the returning migrants from the Gulf. In South Asia, particularly among the Muslim migrant workers from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India working in the gulf countries are facing a state of confused identity and a dilemma over the differences in the interpretation of Islam in Wahabi societies like Saudi Arabia. Since most of the migrant workers are illiterate or have little formal or religious education they are likely to be influenced by the Wahabi strict interpretation of Islam and feel guilty for not implementing fundamentalist practices in their own society. Therefore, on their return, they start implementing radical practices and a new form of intolerance to soft religious practices in the society emerges.

14. Low Left Identity Bulge and Self Radicalization,

Another source of radical tendency within certain individual is nothing but a self assessment of the society motivated by low left identical bulge. Internet and other kinds of information and communication networks serve to be the breeding ground for this kind of self-radicalization. The ideology of violence and obsession to particular things or repulsion to some ideological, cultural or even political approach led people to cultivate radical mentality and to join into similar bulge of radical forces.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the changing socio-economic structures and both vulnerabilities and opportunities of globalization, identity politics is becoming more dynamic and complex. In the post 9/11, though religion based identity elements has always been in the key attention, economic, political and other socio-cultural components, ignored mostly, also became highly influential in determining

³⁰ Vaughn, B. 2007, January 31. "Islamist Extremism in Bangladesh", *CRS Report for Congress*. Retrieved from <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22591.pdf>

³¹ Hussain, M. / Palong K. 2010, Feb. 19. "For Rohingya in Bangladesh, No Place is Home" *Time World, Postcard from Bangladesh*. Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1966621,00.html>

the direction and the patterns of identity politics. Political parties and terrorist organizations clearly identified with religions, insurgent groups, identity groups based on economic and environmental dislocation are opting for greater share making them legitimate stakeholders within the society. Consequently, states are also becoming far more assertive and extreme in terms of maintaining law and order and there is a growth of confrontational politics among the mainstream political parties and the government itself. Far right movements and religious parties are taking the benefits exploiting the condition, where marginalized and deprived community remains silent no longer taking the path of extremism to demand and attain their rights and shares within the community. An integrated and comprehensive effort is necessary to address the repercussions of the extremist developments in terms of identity politics. Some of the recommendations that my researches on the issue offer include:

- Increasing dialogue among the stakeholders and different identity groups.
- Managing social recognition of identity groups and their legitimate imperatives and demands.
- Fostering inclusive economic growth and increase in the equality of the society.
- More social engagement and contribution of the advance and richer community for the poor.
- Cultural exchange and exploration of commonalities and cooperation among the identity groups.
- Ensuring minority rights and effective nation building.
- Functional democratization and strong, efficient and accountable institutions for state administration.
- Increasing efficiency in the political governance and upholding rule of law and ending human rights violation by the state authorities.
- Wide scale awareness building and program directed to increase tolerance in the society
- Ethical education and more creative participation of the youth in the society
- Protection of the cyber spaces against unwarranted use and so on.