

Religious Radicalisation in Pakistan: *Defining a Common Narrative*

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Abstract

Variant views, on the existence of religious radicalisation as a problem in Pakistan, have restricted sustainable initiative for de-radicalisation. The culture of not challenging the violent discourse is the real problem creating an intolerant society in Pakistan. The present narrative of the militants is based on the notion that Pakistan's identity, as an Islamic state, is under attack and people can only prove to be good Muslim if they oppose the state following the western ideals of liberalism and democracy. The paper examines the contradiction between the existing narrative preventing the efforts to eradicate the mind-set based on hatred and intolerance and the need for a counter-narrative to reclaim Pakistan's identity as a progressive Muslim state. It is important to note that military operations against terrorism can only treat the symptom but not the cause. The problems multiply due to lack of a unified approach to identify the issue and its solution. The way religious radicalisation is defined by the conservative groups is completely different from the secular forces in the country; the majority of the moderates prefer to remain silent on the issue which is often misunderstood by the West as a tacit support to religious radicalisation.

Keywords: Radicalisation, Religious Radicalisation, Intolerance, Violent Extremism, Conflict, Terrorism, Civil Society.

Introduction

Religious radicalisation poses serious threat to the idea of a modern, progressive and developed Pakistan. Aggressive competition for control by the competing orthodox religious forces and the violent expression has made the entire country hostage to religious intolerance and militancy. Variant views on the root causes of radicalisation have

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restricted sustainable initiative for de-radicalisation. The interests of extremist groups are in sharp contrast with the long term interests of the state.

During the last decade, Pakistan has experienced a deep social catastrophe in which violent religious groups have challenged the writ of the state. How far extremist mind- set can go to achieve their ultimate objective depends on how well they do in retaining and expanding their political power in the unfolding dynamics of Pakistan's internal and geo-political situation. There is thus the paradox that while people in Pakistan respect religious leaders for their social and religious role and even more believe schools should put more emphasis on Islam, they don't vote for them in elections for a political role. The religious parties are nevertheless positioned to maintain their street power as measured by their ability to organize demonstrations.

The polity is a victim of violent religious extremism in an environment of fear and insecurity. The state is confronted with a variety of religious, political and militant organisations that have fostered an enabling environment for radicalisation and violence. Some groups focused on providing a space for interaction and connections with more militant actors while others were directly involved in violent activity in the name of an exclusive Islamic identity. Despite the costs borne by Pakistani victims of terror, some segments of Pakistani society with confused state of religious identity continue to sympathize, justify or, at times, even directly support violence paved the way for militant groups to operate. Thus the indigenous tolerant, syncretic and peaceful Islamic tradition was increasingly replaced by harsh, literalist and bland versions practiced by the extremist fringe.

This paper attempts to examine absence of a common narrative against religious radicalisation and prevailing confusion vis-à-vis identifying religiously radical individuals and groups.

There is a need for evaluating what is the meaning of religious radicalisation and its influence at socio-political level. While too much attention is given to terrorist groups through military operations, the large segment of the society is vulnerable to religious radicalisation due

to varying definition of religious radicalisation and lack of consensus on defining a counter- narrative on violent extremism.

The paper is an attempt to examine the diverse views on defining radicalisation as a problem and to understand why it is not as simple a phenomenon to deal with. There is also a need to understand the historical, ideological, political, social and economic roots of religious radicalisation. In this study some questions are raised which help in examining the issue of religious radicalisation. They are:

- a) Is it true that religious radicalisation was restricted to a particular group of orthodox sections within the society?;
- b) Does a silent moderate majority exist or is it more of an idea that needs further investigation?;
- c) Are people aware of the gravity of the problem and do they know ignorance and denial are creating more problems?

In order to comprehend the problem of religious radicalisation, we have to begin with the fact that radical Islamist world view¹ has created a youth bulge that has internalized hard-line extremist discourse on national and international affairs. This exclusivist view is dangerous, given the ethnic and religious diversity; inclusive approach is the only way to guarantee true religious pluralism. Their main reference points are transnational Muslim identity; Western injustices against Muslims; non-resolution of the Palestinian and Kashmir issues; the West as an adversary of Muslims; and the role of the Islamic movement rather than Muslim states as the liberators of Muslims from the Western domination.

The paper provides a detailed analysis of the definition of radicalisation. The general definition in Pakistani context and various viewpoints are discussed to understand many aspects that we tend to overlook. Local and global perspectives on radicalisation are discussed as well, which is important in order to see why the problem is taken

¹The Islamist radical world view combines a totalitarian political mindset with a religious belief in sacred prophecy that they are on the righteous path mandated by God to rule the world. They have taken up this responsibility to act against the “infidels” because the end of the world is approaching fast, in other words, an apocalyptic belief that only a system based on their interpretation of “*Sharia*” would save the world.

differently in the West and what could be the best ways to have some sort of understanding on the issue to deal with the problem both internally and externally. An in-depth discussion on divergent views within the society is also highlighted. The study ends with a conclusion which provides key findings of the research.

Radicalisation: Definition and Analysis

Radicalisation can best be defined by several scholars as a process or many processes, for instance, Wilner and Dubouloz, in a discussion on how home-grown extremism often follows a process of “transformative learning” suggests, “Radicalisation is a personal process in which individuals adopt extreme political, social, and/or religious ideals and aspirations, and where the attainment of particular goals justifies the use of indiscriminate violence. It is both a mental and emotional process that prepares and motivates an individual to pursue violent behaviour.”² Stevens and Neuman argue, “Most of the definitions currently in circulation describe radicalisation as the process (or processes) whereby individuals or groups come to approve of and (ultimately) participate in the use of violence for political aims. Some authors refer to ‘violent radicalisation’ in order to emphasise the violent outcome and distinguish the process from non-violent forms of ‘radical’ thinking.”³ Crossett and Spitaletta attempted a broadly reaching review of psychological and sociological concepts in radicalisation. They define radicalisation as, “The process by which an individual, group, or mass of people undergo a transformation from participating in the political process via legal means to the use or support of violence for political purposes (radicalism).”⁴

It is argued that terrorism is most usefully viewed not as a “condition,” but as a dynamic “process.” The nature of that process,

² A. S. Wilner and C. J. Dubouloz, “Homegrown terrorism and transformative learning: an interdisciplinary approach to understanding radicalisation,” *Global Change, Peace & Security* (formerly *Pacifica Review: Peace, Security & Global Change*) 22:1 (2010): 38.

³ T. Stevens and P. Neuman, “Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action,” *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR)*, 2009: 10.

⁴ C. Crossett and J. Spitaletta, *Radicalisation: Relevant psychological and sociological concepts* (Ft. Meade, MD: U.S. Army Asymmetric Warfare Group, September 2010), 10.

however, remains poorly understood. The assumption is that many pathways into and through radicalisation do exist, and each pathway is itself affected by a variety of factors. Within this “developmental” or “pathway” approach, radicalisation is viewed not as the product of a single decision but the end result of a dialectical process that gradually pushes an individual toward a commitment to violence over time.⁵

It is interesting to note that radicalisation does not always lead to violence in the initial phases. So, a slow process of radicalisation may be taking place in a country and yet there is no realization or assessment of the gravity of the situation. Taking it from the origin of the Latin word “Radis” or “root” which means buried in the roots or fundamental⁶, it shows that radical is a person who wishes to bring the fundamental political, economic and social change. Thus, radicalisation is a mindset by which people adopt extreme views, including beliefs and violent measures are taken for political or religious gains. In the US, the term “Counter Violent Extremism” was used to describe those who were at the risk of radicalisation and becoming terrorists. In early 2010, Daniel Benjamin, coordinator of the State Department’s office of Counterterrorism described it first.⁷ The idea was to initiate the efforts to stop the people who could be radicalized and later become terrorists by providing the means to undercut the ideological and rhetorical narratives which drive violent extremism. Thus, in the western context, a set of beliefs and practices which are anti-intellectual, anti-modern, anti – liberal and anti-democratic are associated with radicalisation. We can say that as a political ideology, radicalisation is a mindset translated into religio-political actions that tend to be violence-prone and can give impetus to terrorism.

Defining Religious Radicalisation

In contemporary discourse on religious radicalisation, religion is often believed to be at the centre of one’s radicalisation, or radical ideals, and unfortunately post 9/11 discussion fling Muslims into the fray. Radical

⁵ G. H. McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003): 473-507.

⁶ Merriam Webster Dictionary -2016, MA-USA.

⁷ *Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan*, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Washington DC, May 12, 2012.

ideas are instilled in common people, who have very little understanding of their own of religion, in a way that they consider them absolute. For the purpose of academic analysis, religious radicalisation can be defined as, “a process by which a person or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo, or rejects and/or undermines contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice.”⁸ However becoming radicalized doesn't necessarily lead to violence. Robert Mandel refers to religious radicalisations as, “an increase in and/or reinforcing of extremism in the thinking, sentiments, and/or behaviour of individuals and/or groups of individuals”,⁹ Alex Schmid quoted Baehr to define religious radicalisation as, “the concept radicalisation defines an individual process, which influenced by external actors, causes socialisation during which internalisation and adoption of ideas and views takes place which are supported and advanced in every form. [Armed] with these ideas and views, the persons [affected] strive to bring about a radical change of the social order. If the ideas and views represent an extremist ideology, they even seek to achieve their goals by means of violence. [What is] decisive is, that radicalisations presuppose a process of socialization, during which individuals adopt, over a shorter or longer period of time, political ideas and views which in their extremist form can lead to the legitimization of political violence’.¹⁰

In the sub-continent, the term fanatic was used by W.W. Hunter during the early 19th Century for Sayyid Ahmad to characterise his *Tauheed* (Oneness of Allah), war waging upon all infidels, spirit of revolt against the British Rule and declaring India as ‘*Dar-ul-harb*’ (‘house of war’).¹¹ In the 20th Century, the backdrop furnishing the

⁸ Wilner and Dubouloz, “Homegrown terrorism and transformative learning: an interdisciplinary approach to understanding radicalisation,” *Global Change, Peace, and Security* 22:1 (2010): 38.

⁹ David R. Mandel, “Radicalisation: What does it mean?” in *Indigenous Terrorism: Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalisation among Groups with an Immigrant Heritage in Europe*, eds., Thomas M. Pick, Anne Speckhard, Beatrice Jacuch, , IOS Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Alex Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*, ICCT Research Paper, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, March 2013:18

¹¹ 9 W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans* (Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1999), 52-53, 58-60, 63.

contemporary setting was the *Deoband*-tribal nexus against the British, rooted in the new and exciting politics of anti-colonialism and pan-Islamism, galvanized by the start of the First World War.¹² The difference between colonial definitions of religious uprisings categorized as fanaticism by oriental writers is that the post-colonial religious radicalisation is much more religious motivated while fanaticism was contextualized drive directed at political adversaries.¹³

Religious Radicalisation in Pakistani Context

The need to comprehend and clarify the phenomenon of “religious radicalisation” is imperative because it has produced a sense of fear and foreboding in Pakistani society. It is difficult to explore or analyse the word “Radicalisation” in Pakistani context as the society is ethnically heterogeneous and divided along ethno-linguistic, ideological, sectarian and political lines. There is no agreed definition of radicalisation in Pakistan due to differences on whether it is a problem at all or just a western rhetoric.

There seems to be a great disparity in Western and Pakistani contexts when it comes to establishing radicalisation as a problem. Religious radicalisation is often mixed with terrorism in our society, that is why it is difficult to develop a coherent approach to handle it. It is not considered as a problem unless there is obvious violence in society. The confusion further contributes to the intolerance in the society. Generally, the term radicalisation is defined as the process of adopting an extremist belief system, that includes the willingness to use, supports, or facilitates violence as a method to effect societal change.

In Pakistan, geography, ethnicity and sectarianism contribute to defining radicalisation. Religious radicalisation cannot be defined as a single phenomenon based on the policies of the successive governments. There are some internal and external dimensions to this problem, too.

¹² Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (Hurst & Company, 2007), 93-98.

¹³ Muhammad Feyyez, “Youth Extremism in Pakistan – Magnitude, Channels, Resident Spheres and Response,” *Defence Against Terrorism Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring&Fall 2014): 63-92.

The internal dimensions within the state are more critical and severe than external dimensions.

Religious and National Identity

There is no doubt that Pakistan is struggling to come out of the problem of religious intolerance and extremism. One of the major problems that led to the confusion about defining the ideology of Pakistan was the tragedy that struck this country with the death of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The vacuum which was left by Quaid-e-Azam could not be filled and it created a lot of problems for newly independent state to define a direction for a moderate Muslim state. It is a no secret that Mr Jinnah wanted such a Pakistan where people from all religions, castes, creeds and cultures would be treated equally, and their religious beliefs will have nothing to do with the business of the state as he expressed his views on August 11, 1947¹⁴ while addressing the first constitutional Assembly. In the subsequent years in Pakistani political history, there have been conflicting views on the use of religion in politics. Religious forces aimed for a theocratic state while liberal and progressive forces desired a modern democratic Pakistan.

In Pakistan, not only intolerance against other religions but deep antagonism also exists among various sects within Muslim community, this has pushed the country into deep sectarian strife. Extremist groups have been using this divide to pressurize the state by using the pretext of support from community following their sectarian ideology that contributes to radicalisation within the society. The antagonism within the Muslim majority encourages the environment of hostility and exploitation of religious beliefs.

Increasing Religious Radicalisation

Though the current military operation is targeting the terrorists in the country, the vulnerable situation in FATA, KP and Karachi cannot be ignored. Given this, it is argued that violence inside Punjab is critical to destabilize the state. The acceptability of the extremist ideology and its

¹⁴Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on August 11, 1947 available at National Assembly of Pakistan website at <http://www.na.gov.pk/en/content.php?id=74>

violent manifestation witnessed at the time of Governor Punjab Salman Taseer's assassination in 2011 by his own guard was something to be seriously examined. The religious intolerance vis-à-vis other religious groups and sects within Islam is affecting the nation badly even more than what is happening across the border in Afghanistan. It is quite worrisome that the radicalisation has plagued the major urban cities of Punjab and various militant groups including *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (JeM), *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP), *Lashkar-e-Taiba* (LeT), *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* (HuJI) and *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ) even after being banned resurfaced under new names and have strengthened their roots in the area. Southern Punjab is an impoverished and underdeveloped area. Human welfare metrics diverge sharply from the rest of the Punjab, and state capacity and legitimacy are weak here. This has allowed considerable freedom of action for militants, including the open operation of various radical madrassas for recruitment and training. Ironically they do not having the necessary unanimity when it comes to defining their view points. It is the most dangerous trends in Pakistan's domestic insurgency where many former militant groups in Punjab targeted the state and collaborated with tribal militants in FATA and KP.

The Punjabi Taliban, as they have come to be known, are generally believed to include the *Jaish-e-Muhammed* (JeM), *Sipha-e-Sahaba* (SSP), *Harkat ul Jihad al-Islami* (HuJI) and the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ), or at the very least their splinter elements. The LeT, perhaps the most operationally prolific, is occasionally included in this grouping but it is markedly distinct from the others in that it has conscientiously avoided any violence within Pakistan. The "Punjabi" term may also be an imprecise label in that these groups also contain Sindhis and Urdu-speakers.¹⁵ Under intensifying pressure and scrutiny from the Pakistani government and Western nations, these groups (barring perhaps the LeT) have increasingly gravitated away from the state and towards the tribal militants of the KP and FATA. Prior to 9/11, many groups maintained some presence in Afghanistan. Some, such as, the SSP and LeJ did so

¹⁵ "Behind the Lines: Punjab's Growing Militant Problem," *Foreign Policy*, June 22, 2010, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/06/22/afpak_behind_the_lines_punjab_growing_militant_problem

due to crackdowns under Nawaz Sharif's government in 1998-1999, and virtually all had links to Afghanistan from the time of the Soviet jihad.¹⁶

The religious radicalisation is not confined to Punjab only. In Sindh province, too, the rural areas have seen mushroom growth of madrassas with sectarian intentions which has certainly disturbed the culture based on hundreds of years of tolerant Sufi tradition and religious pluralism. The capital of the province, Karachi, however presents a picture of badly managed, violent infested city that has been on the receiving end of not just criminal elements but slowly and gradually became a "haven" for extremist groups, thus damaging not only the social fabric but its economic and political standing in the world. The arrest of some of the most wanted militants in Karachi proved that, due to its cosmopolitan nature, the city has been embracing all groups and they continued with their agenda and gradually influenced the educated urban middle class changing their perception from being moderate/secular to religiously intolerant. Simultaneously, as military operations increased in FATA and KP, a growing number of al-Qaeda, Afghan Taliban and TTP members moved to the urban invisibility of Karachi's sprawling Pakhtun slums, and, occasionally, mounted deadly attacks against high-value targets in Karachi.

The Process of Religious Radicalisation: Diverse Explanations

Radicalisation is a process and network of likeminded people enable to strengthen this process. Alex Schmid, quoting Dalgaard-Nielson's study, comes up with six stages to the process: 1) identifying a problem as not just a misfortune, but an injustice; 2) constructing a moral justification for violence (religious, ideological, political); 3) blaming the victims ("it is their own fault"); 4) dehumanizing the victims through language and symbols; 5) displacing responsibility (God or other authorities ordered the individual to commit the act of violence) or diffusing responsibility (the group, not the individual is responsible); and 6) misconstruing or minimizing the harmful effects (by using euphemisms or by contrasting to other acts which are worse).¹⁷

¹⁶ "The Militant Jihadi Challenge," *International Crisis Group*, Asia Report No 164, March 13, 2009.

¹⁷ Alex P. Schmid, Al-Qaeda's "Single Narrative" and Attempts to Develop Counter Narratives: The State of knowledge," *International Centre for Counter Terrorism*

The focus on homogenous culture rather than celebrating ethnic, religious or linguistic diversity created a gulf between the state and the society. Widespread radicalisation has not only filled that gap but it has also affected public attitudes towards other sects and religions, which ultimately disturbs communal harmony in the society.

Tracing the sources of radicalisation of young people within Pakistan's radicalized society and regressive policies in the past, Dr. Hasan Askari elaborates, "It is easy to get radical ideological inspiration in Pakistan because Islamic orthodoxy and militancy have seeped deep into Pakistan's state system and society, political discourse of Islamic radicalism and the political right has become integral to the mindset of countless people who tend to view national and international affairs in purely religious terms. Askari continues by arguing that a large number of Pakistani youth "is attracted to Islamic radicalism and do not feel obligated to the imperatives of collective good or societal responsibility except in an Islamic context because the majority of them have nothing else to look forward to in their life...These youngsters have a tendency to develop alienation from the adopted country and become vulnerable to hardcore religious appeals. They adopt an Islamic way of life and mindset that shapes their disposition towards the adopted country and the international system."¹⁸

The phenomenon of radicalisation is very complex in Pakistan and has different layers, trends and drivers. As explained by a security and political analyst Amir Rana, there are three visible levels, which help to identify the trends and drivers, as they affect different parts of society. Firstly, among lower classes, mainly poorly governed areas which include tribal and its adjoining areas, South Punjab and interior Sindh, where the drivers to radicalisation and terrorism are poverty, inequality and loose administrative structures, and motives are religious and manifestation is sectarian violence. In tribal areas it can further contribute to the ongoing insurgency. Secondly, among the middle

The Hague (ICCT), Research Paper January 2014, 7-8 quoting A. Dalgaard-Nielson, Studying violent radicalisation in Europe II: The potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches, Danish Institute for International Studies, Working Paper, no. 2008/03 (2008):10.

¹⁸*Daily Times*, May 9, 2010.

classes, mainly in urban- or semi-urban areas, including central and North Punjab, Karachi, Hyderabad in Sindh, settled areas in KP and Kashmir, the drivers are political (influence of internal and external political developments and radical narrative promoting by radical groups and media) and manifestation is jihadism. (Militant organisations like *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, *Jiash-e-Muhammad* and *al-Qaeda* affiliated terrorist cell, and *Hizb-e-Islami* mainly depend on this core of radicalisation). Finally, among upper middle class and elites in the country, major driver is alienation and separation from the society.¹⁹

Siddiqa, disagrees with the common notion that poverty alone is the reason behind radicalisation in Pakistan. She argues, “a popular perception in Pakistan is that extremism, radicalism and militancy are primarily driven by poverty and lack of education. Give the boys jobs and you will detract them from going the jihadi route. This may be true for foot soldiers but militancy itself grows due to radicalism which has rapidly spread amongst the middle and upper-middle classes as well. Today radicalism is part of an emerging pop culture. Under the circumstances, it would, in any case, become difficult to stop the poor from turning into foot soldiers not just because of financial reasons but also due to their desire to ape those socially above them.”²⁰

Masud, strongly believes that Radicalisation is the result of intellectual stagnation of society which was promoted by the decision makers in tandem with the religious orthodoxy. The intellectual climate of the country was better in the 1950s, when scholars like Dr. Fazlur Rahman were working on the reconstruction of Islamic thought. Unfortunately, despite their academic credibility in the institution of learning in the West and the Muslim world, very few have benefitted from their work. It is the static mindset that does not encourage critical

¹⁹ Interview with Amir Rana at PIPS office on June 27, 2012.

²⁰ Ayesha Siddiqa, “Rationalizing the Jihadi Discourse,” *Express Tribune*, August 13, 2011. Also see Ayesha Siddiqa, “Red hot Chilli Peppers Islam: Is the youth in Elite Universities in Pakistan Radical?,” *Heinrich Boll Stiftung*, https://pk.boell.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Red_Hot_Chilli_Peppers_Islam_-_Complete_Study_Report.pdf

thinking that needs to be addressed, which not only exists in madrasa system but, unfortunately to some extent, in public education aslo ..”²¹

Local versus Global Perspectives

Lack of consensus does not only exist within the country but between western and our local understanding of definition also and that is one reason for prevailing misunderstanding in diagnosing the root cause of the problem. “The Clash of Civilization” by Samuel P. Huntington sparked a debate globally on the issue of “West” versus the “Rest” in his article published in 1993, in the *Foreign Affairs*. He pointed out major differences among the civilizations, where different cultures and religious identities are the main factor in building cooperation or creating a conflict. He argued that self-assertion and cooperation between the non-western ‘civilizations’ especially the Islamic would be against the western interest. Ironically, to this day, many in the West, continue to see the problems from Huntington’s theory. Huntington’s argument was countered by a number of scholars, for example, “The Clash of Ignorance” was presented as a rebuttal to “The Clash of Civilizations,” which argues that after the Cold War, the dominant source of conflict for mankind would be cultural. Huntington’s theory principally revolves around the civilizations of “the West” and “Islam.” “The Clash of Ignorance” provides a critical response to Huntington’s thesis, in which Said asserts that the uses of labels such as “the West” and “Islam” are dangerous and serve to confuse about a disorderly reality. Edward Said argues that through “The Clash of Civilizations?” Huntington recklessly affirms the personification of enormous and complex entities such as “the West” and “Islam.” “The Clash of Ignorance” is also critical of Huntington’s thesis on the grounds that complicated matters like identity and culture are presented in a “cartoon like fashion,” with the West always appearing more virtuous compared to the Islam adversary.²² Jeffery Haynes in his paper, “Twenty Years After Huntington’s Clash of Civilization writes,” the very idea of a world divided into ‘seven, or eight major civilizations’ is absurd. Time has shown, once again, that anyone

²¹Dr. Khalid Masud speaking at a seminar on “De-radicalisation of the vulnerable segment of the society,” organized by Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) on February 22, 2012.

²² Edward W. Said, “The Clash of Ignorance,”*Nation*, USA, October 4, 2001, <http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance/>

who takes seriously the idea of a world divided into seven or eight major civilizations lacks capacity to have any possible understanding of our fascinating mosaic of a world filled with myriad ideas, norms, beliefs and conceptions of how the world is.”²³ Chen Li in “How inevitable is A Clash of Civilization?” argued, “the clash of civilizations thesis is a mistaken paradigm of understanding the post-Cold War international order. While cultural and religious identities have increasingly become a source of political mobilization in the post-Cold War world, the clash of civilizations thesis wrongly presumes that the civilization identities can override other major driving forces of political mobilization, which includes nation-state, global capitalism, and global governance based on common liberal values. All of these forces run against and will constrain the possibility of a clash of civilizations.”²⁴ The counter arguments did get a place in academia and media but post 9/11 world is witnessing *Islamophobia* increasingly becoming part of the discourse in the West, particularly, Donald Trump’s election campaign and his success in primaries for republican presidential candidate largely based on *Islamophobia* rhetoric.

The contemporary political literature in the West seems to be obsessed by the Islamists groups as the biggest threat to the western societies. Hence, the policies of some of the developed countries, for instance the US, UK and EU counter terrorism initiatives, are targeted towards nabbing the Islamist groups who are radicalizing the Muslim population in the Western countries. It appears that there is a clear clash of ideas that has emerged in the last few years. Muslim world on the other hand, has developed a narrative that there is huge contradiction in what the West says about equality, non-discrimination and injustice and what it actually does to the people following Islam as their faith. There is strong resentment in the Muslim world on using the word “Islamic radicalisation” or “Islamic extremists”, for they believe that radicalisation and extremism is a social phenomenon and cannot be restricted to one religion. History is full of examples where radical

²³ Jeffery Haynas, “Twenty Years After Huntington’s Clash of Civilization,” ed., J. Paul Barkar, “The Clash of Civilization: Twenty Years On,” (Bristol, UK e-International Relations, 2013):13.

²⁴ Chen Li, “How inevitable is a Clash of Civilization?,” *Journal of Cambridge Studies*, vol. 5, no.2-3, 104.

groups in other religions created havoc against their minorities trying to establish their religious agenda.

Although it is not a completely true assessment, many in Pakistan would argue that the radicalisation in the society is a result of the US ‘War on Terror.’ 9/11 was the only terrorist incident in the US but there are a number of terrorist attacks in Pakistan since then. The casualties, which occurred in these terrorist incidents, are far more than the US. A strong conservative section of Pakistani society widely shares the perception that the US is part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. Images of civilian casualties in Afghanistan and in the tribal areas of Pakistan are used by hardcore Islamic groups to foment extremism, militancy and intolerance. The argument of extremist groups is simple: since the US is responsible for causing enormous sufferings to Muslims, particularly in Afghanistan and in Iraq, there is no option left than to target the symbols of Western culture and to establish a “true” Islamic state.

According to the PEW Research Centre’s Global Attitude Project about different countries in 2014, 66 per cent people in Pakistan are concerned about growing extremism in the country. 42 per cent has negative view of al-Qaeda and 59 per cent view Taliban unfavourably while 33 per cent did not reply, 83 per cent Pakistanis said that suicide bombing is never justified²⁵. While there is little doubt that the strikes have disrupted al-Qaeda’s operations, the larger question is to what extent they may have increased the appeal of militant groups and undermined the Pakistani state.²⁶

²⁵ PEW Research Centre: Global Attitudes and Trends, “High Levels of Concern about Islamic Extremism in Most Countries,” Spring 2014 Global Attitude Survey, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/07/01/concerns-about-islamic-extremism-on-the-rise-in-middle-east/pg-2014-07-01-islamic-extremism-02/>

Also, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/07/01/concerns-about-islamic-extremism-on-the-rise-in-middle-east/pg-2014-07-01-islamic-extremism-05/>

²⁶ Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, “The Drone War,” *New Republic*, June 3, 2009.

Divergent Views within the Society: Lacking the Consensus

There is a serious gap and difference of opinion when it comes to defining and identifying the problem of religious radicalisation within Pakistan. Terrorism has no religion but in contemporary discourse on terrorism, it is the manifestation of religious radicalisation. Unfortunately, violent acts have been committed in the name of Islam — a religion which is peace-loving and tolerant and lays great emphasis on its core values of compassion, justice and benevolence.

Ironically, the radicals in Muslims societies have taken upon themselves to fight for the Islamic causes all over the world based on their own dogmatic views about their religion. In these circumstances, it is a travesty to equate Islam with terrorism on the basis of the personal behaviour of the heretics, which runs counter to its fundamental teachings. The official position on radicalisation equates it as extremism in society which is prevailed in the country due to different factors. The militant organisations look it as a just cause for the promotion of jihad for the survival of Islam. The religious leaders in Pakistan think that the government's decision to become an ally the US against al-Qaeda was unfair hence it is their duty to convince the people about where their support should go. Some right-wing conservative political parties also look at the problem differently: they support the argument that Pakistan has been dragged into this war against terrorism. Secular parties are, however, supportive of confronting extremism with a strong opinion that the radical extremist hijacked the public space and, despite their small number, threats and violence has been instrumental in imposing their agenda on the people of Pakistan. Due to lack of understanding which leads to absence of coherent approach towards defining radicalisation, the issue remains problematic and multiplies complexities.

In FATA, with widespread illiteracy, militants managed to exploit drone attacks to recruit and all efforts to counter the militancy remained unsuccessful. Militants used the victim of drone attack to build the narrative against the war on terrorism and even analysts like Rahimullah Yusufzai wrote that drone attacks were radicalizing other people who

may not have supported the Taliban.²⁷ The Taliban leaders, Baitullah Mehsud and Hakimullah Mehsud, used the unpopularity of the drone attacks and stated that suicide bombing in Pakistan was a reaction to drone attacks in Pakistan.²⁸

Cultural and Religious Dimension

In Pakistani religious and political discourse, major concerns are issues of religious observance, traditional forms of culture, external cultural influences, and public debate on religion and culture. People freely voicing their opinion on religion and engaged in religious discourse is out of question because of the sensitivity attached to these issues and socio-political environment. An important aspect is the issue of religious representatives, do the radical religio-political groups really represent majority of the people? The radical groups use the euphemism that there is a threat of imposition of cultural takeover. The affirmation that a 'monoculture' is rising due to globalization which "attacks local cultures and, thus, deprives societies of their ability to remain tied to traditional roots" seems to be true in Pakistan's case. The radicals do proclaim their commitment to resist the monoculture, which they hold is 'highly influenced' by western cultural values. That is why the process of radicalisation in Pakistan has strong international linkages. The radicals believe that their religious and cultural values are under attack.

In the post-9/11 scenario, both domestic and external dynamics of the state changed due to change in policy at the highest level. The crackdown on radical religious groups, and withdrawal of state patronage to religious leaders, their parties, and madrassas, led to frustration and anger within the Islamist groups. Neither the religious parties, nor their radical offshoots are ready to give up the command and control they have enjoyed for decades. Years of religious rhetoric have influenced the young minds. The fear of losing that status is primary, when related to any other concern or "goal" that these groups might have had in the past. The prevailing situation poses a dilemma for them since they feel that their existence is at stake and in order to ensure their survival, they are

²⁷ Rahimullah Yusufzai, "US Drone War Delivers Results, But at What Price?," *Dawn*, January 10, 2010, <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawncontent-library/dawn/news/world/18-us-drone-war-am-10>

²⁸ Ibid.

willing to go to any length, even if it means drifting away from the ideological boundaries of Pakistan because for them, Pakistan matters only till its establishment supports the idea of a state based on *Sharia* according to their interpretation. Pakistan without a theocratic identity, to them, is as evil as any other un-Islamic country.

Conclusion

Religion in Pakistan will never cease to exist. People will continue with their faith and the expression of faith in the manner they have been doing for centuries. In foreseeable future, the agenda of the government should be to support a healthy fusion of religious values and culture that have been the practice in the sub-continent since the arrival of Islam. Imposition of orthodox ideas of a particular sect in a country with multiple sects have been counterproductive and created friction and sectarian violence. The message needs to be conveyed clearly that radicalisation entails politicization of a religion and it becomes part of power struggle which turns into an ideology with followers who could die for it. In this situation, it loses its character as purely spiritual factor. It becomes an ideology focusing on purely political and economic goals. This is what happened in Pakistan. The ideologues of militant Islam are more concerned about establishing their control in the country claiming the resources, power and status. It impinges on the rights of individuals and carries implications for legal and political system. Such ideology needs to be countered by rational counter strategy by the state.

Pakistan is suffering from the menace of religious radicalisation, the problems, however, multiply due to lack of unified approach to identify the issue and its solution. The way religious radicalisation is defined by the conservative groups is completely different from the secular forces in the country; the majority of the moderates prefer to remain silent on the issue that is at times misunderstood by the West as tacit support. More than anything, Pakistan needs to have a consensus on the nature of the problem and complete support to the government to take initiatives to curb radicalisation.

Confusion vis-à-vis “who is a true Muslim,” is also due to a lack of the Islamic tradition of “*Ijtihad*,” a practice where religious scholars at that time engage in a discourse to bring in independent interpretation of

the text with an objective to apply Quranic laws to the changing circumstances. The irony is that in today's Pakistan, a number of so-called *Ulema* and religious leaders with political patronage claim to be the ones who could present the best solutions to the problems restraining the real experts to articulate a definitive interpretation of the holy text. The Islamic scholars who dare to label the killing of innocent civilians in the name of religion as un-Islamic, face threats and harsh criticism from religious political parties whose most favoured tool for public mobilization is often a call for jihad against the "infidels," The most apt example of this dilemma is Ghamdi's self-exile due to threats to his life. It is also to be noted that the word 'Jihad' is being utterly misused by the religious fanatics. A simplistic and overzealous attempt to introduce the laws of a totally different social formation into the socio-political fabric of a post-colonial, urbanizing, pluralistic society with an increasing breakdown of primary group ties, can neither serve to maintain peace nor meet the ends of justice. On the contrary, it breeds violence and contempt for the existing legal system and rule of law.²⁹

The decision to come up with a National Action Plan (NAP) by the government after the Peshawar APS massacre presents the aspirations of the state to overcome religious radicalisation and terrorism, it does describe *WHAT* the state shall do but does not discuss *HOW* it is going to act upon to achieve the goals. NAP requires some serious institutional and structural adjustments, making it more inclusive of civil society, academia and religious scholars to define hate speech, violent ideologies and create a consensus on self-destroying religious extremist views finding a place in media and educational institutions.

Pakistan needs a serious rethinking as it faces the challenge of reinventing itself both at state level as well as societal level. But more so, it needs to have top-down approach to reform and reconstruct the conceptual and ideological orientation to undo the past policy of enforcement of Islam of a particular sect. If the society appears indifferent about the nature of religiosity, it is not because people want it the way things are today, but there is a great deal of confusion and it can only be removed if a top-down approach is fully implemented to de-radicalize the society through education syllabus, media programmemes

²⁹Arshi Saleem Hashmi, "Pakistan: Politics, Religion & Extremism," IPCS Research paper no.21, May 2009, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi.

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and free intellectual discourse on religion and cultural nature of the society in Pakistani context. At present, there is a consensus on military operation against the militants but a consensus on the drivers of militancy and role of exploitation of religion by various groups who abuse the religion and create further confusion is missing. That consensus is the key not only for the successful military operations but sustainable political solutions to prevent radicalisation in any form.