Religious Extremism and Community Resilience: Case Study of Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan is facing, since its inception, extremism in one or the other form. Religious extremism is posing serious existential threat to Pakistan. This paper explains the different factors that contribute in religious extremism in Pakistan. The transformation of a peaceful Sindh province into an extremist region is also elucidated in this research. Multiple Counter Extremism techniques are discussed in this paper. The paper illuminates that how Fatwa can play and important role in countering violent extremism (CVE) in the society. This paper also elaborates the role of imam and mosques in creating community resilience against violence and extremism that is spreading in the society very steadily. The role of religious scholars cannot be ignored in building community resilience among population. The paper illuminates that why these important factors have been failed to create community resilience to counter the prevailing environment of extremism and violence with special reference to Pakistani society. The paper concludes that multiple solutions and steps can maintain community resilience in the society. Revival of teaching of Sufi saints, revision of curriculum, teaching of peace and tolerance, and economic and political inclusion are some of these steps.

Key Words: Pakistan, Religious Extremism, Community Resilience, CVE.

Introduction

Pakistan is the first country that got independence after 2nd World War in the name of religion (Burki, 1999). Pakistan is an Ideological Islamic state with deep rooted Islamic beliefs. Islam teaches brotherhood, peace, tolerance, co-existence, mutual respect, politeness, kindness to its followers. It is so peaceful that it points out that killing of one human being is the killing of whole humanity. Since the inception of Pakistan, the state is being threatened and challenged by religious extremism during

different phases. These different kinds of threats posed serious challenges to the state. Historically, religion concerns remain more powerful than political consideration in Pakistan. It is the religion that shapes the social, cultural and political norms (Asad, 2003). Since its inception Pakistani society is polarized between liberals and religious fraction. The history of religious violence can be traced back to the early years of Pakistan when Sikh and Hindus were threatened and harassed by attacking their properties to compel them for forced migration. (Ali, 2021, 66). Seed of hatred and religious violence was sowed since the inception of Pakistan. Pakistani political elite ordered to attack their opponents and attacked non-Muslims including Sikhs and Hindus in early years of Independence (Ali, 2021, 66). It is not only clerics but Political elites also have used religion for their political motives. Since independence of Pakistan, the role of Islam is ingrained in the affairs of the state. Although the law of the land is based on English common Law that is secular in nature, yet constitutionally no laws repugnant to Quran and Sunnah can be promulgated in Pakistan. There is no harm it if Islam is a guiding principle in Pakistan as Islam normally unites the human beings and society in general and Muslims in particular. But when the Islam is being misinterpreted in terms of teaching of Quran and Sunnah, it leads towards disunity.

Different people possess different views about the same thing but different individuals having common religious beliefs enjoy the common perception about the world (Cobern, 1991; Asghar, n.d. 17). Similarly, in Pakistan, the society is polarized between secular/modern and Islamist/religious individuals. People have same bonds when it comes to an issue on which they have common feeling. Moreover, state's contradictory policies in general and use of Islam to get political power in particular have proved fatal for the rise of extremism and intolerance is an outcome of it. Although Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and his PPP are known as secular political party yet the Ahmadis were declared Non-Muslims, alcohol was banned, Friday was declared as holiday and many other religious steps were taken during the reign of Bhutto.

Sheikh (2013) has explained the religious violence within the framework of socio theological framework. Some studies suggest that religion is one of the major factors of extremism in Pakistan (Ahmed, 2011; Akram, 2020; Sajjad, 2015). Many studies describe the examples from Muslim world where individuals or group of individuals, on the one hand encourage extremism by advocating the hatred, and on other hand promote terrorism. (Asghar a, n.d., 2; also see Ansari, 2018; Ansary, 2008; Sultan, 2014; Yonghui, 2011; Zahid, 2018). Different modes are being used for religious extremism such as literature, recorded speech, web sites, recruitment videos, and jihadi Anthem.

Although religious extremism is a complicated phenomenon in Pakistan, yet it is more complicated in the Pashtun area (KP) bordering area with Afghanistan. Swat and Dir experienced more violence in recent past. These two districts of KP suffered the most due to war on Terror. Traditionally, the people of Dir area were peaceful but during Afghan war of 1979, many young people from this area joined the Jihad and fought against Russians. After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, these young fighters came back and formed Tahreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadia (TNSM), demanding Islamic Sharia in the province, under the leadership of Sufi Muhammad. The people of the area opined that Jamat-e-Islami (JI) had strong foothold in the area of Dir in the past. In early 1990s, Pakistan People's Party

supported and promoted TSNM to counter the popularity of JI in the area (Ahmed, Sajid & Ashraf, 2021, 35). This policy, ultimately, resulted into spread of terrorism and extremism in the area. Moreover, Asghar (n.d, 1) claims that religious scholars are not open to accept the modern scientific knowledge particularly in Pashtun Society.

Countering Violent Extremism

Extremism is an initial stage that is eventually transformed into violent extremism and afterword terrorism. Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is a policy through which violent extremism in countered and its further spread can be stopped. Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) is a strategy to control the violent extremism before it erupts and Aviod Violent Extremism (AVE) is next step to address violence. So "CVE is a state of war whereas PVE is the state of control but not resolved and AVE is the next step to resolve by launching alternative and mutually beneficial tasks." (Haque, 2021m188) CVE is used during violence and armed measures are used to counter it. PVE is used through dialogue and other related measures to controlled the violent extremism before its occurrence. AVE means to provide different alternative measures to the potential people who have extremist tendency to provide them opportunities for healthier activities to avoid violent extremism. Avoid Violent Extremism (AVE) is a terminology used by Tartakoff (2017) and Baba (2020).

Some scholars study the link between Extremism and religion (Innaccone and Berman (2006). Whereas, some scholar's claims that it is not the religious factor rather it is weak bond between citizens and the state (Ahmed, Sajid & Ashraf, 2021, 34), poor governance, political vacuum, delayed awakening of the government, social injustice and poverty that is causing rise in extremism (Malik, 2105; Anwar, 2019).

Religious Extremism in Sindh

Sindhis were originally under influence of Buddhism for centuries. Muslim Sufis started to preach Islam when they arrived in Sindh around 1000s AD (Ali, 2021, 69). Hindu and Muslims were living together peacefully but the hatred between Muslims and Hindus among local communities of Sindh was erupted due to the decision of British Administration in 1939 regarding forced evacuation of Muslims from Masjid Manzilgah. This decision resulted in parting the ways of both local communities in Sindh. (Shaikh, 21; Ali, 2021, 70). However, after few days their bilateral relations came to normal. Francis Mudie, Sindh's British Governor, claimed in his report in 1947 that there were rare chances of communal violence in Sindh so mostly Hindus were inclined to stay in Pakistan because of this 'great communal harmony' (Boivin & Cook, 2010; Ali, 2021,70). Karachi remained a pro-active player in religious extremism such as proactive role in Ahmadis movement and in formation of the Jamiat-Ul Ansar (Society of the Partisans). (Ali, 2021, 71).

Despite of the fact that Sindh has always remained a peaceful and tolerant society due to Sufism, the developments such as Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 9/11 and war against terrorism have sowed the seed of extremism and terrorism in Sindh. Sindh proved as a resistance force against the islamization policies of Zia (Ali, 2021, 66) The religious extremism in Sindh was not too old phenomenon rather it is just a

two-decade old story. Religious extremism had taken roots in Sindh in the late 1980s. It was followed by two decades of sectarian violence due to severe sectarian competition among sectarian groups in urban cities in general and in Karachi in particular.

Elites have inculcated the religious factor in Sindh by design to get their political motives. State transforming and contradictory policies reinforced the sectarian and ethnic conflict/warfare in Sindh in general and in Karachi in particular. Ali (2021, 65) is of the opinion that religious extremism was inculcated in the people of Sindh by religious political leaders to get their own goals that can help them in achieving their political, economic and social interests.

In 2001, the wave of terrorism has affected the Sindh as Karachi – the economic hub of Pakistan and Capital of Sindh province has turned into hotbed of militant groups specially of Al-Qaeda and Taliban. These groups were involved in many high profile terrorist attacks such as Karachi Airport attack, Safoora goth bus carnage, murder of US journalist Denial Pearl, PNS Mehran attack, the attack on French Naval Engineers in front of the Sheraton hotel in 2002 and attack on US Consulate Karachi. However, most of the associates of these groups relocated themselves in other small cities of Sindh near Karachi when law enforcement agencies started crackdown in Karachi. Karachi, being the favorite destination of Afghan refugees, was becoming the hub of this extremism. (Ali, 2021, 68) The settlement of Pashtuns in Sindh in the wake of military operations in tribal areas and FATA is also a major factor that influenced Sindhi culture. Moreover, many Taliban reached Karachi in guise of IDPs. Some areas of Sindh such as Ghotki, Shikarpur, Khairpur, Sukkur and Jacobabad have close proximity with Balouchistan on one side and with South Punjab on the other side. So during the operations in Balouchistan, people from different areas took refuge in these areas and ultimately turned towards religious extremism due to one or the other reason. (Ali, 2021,74) The settlement of Afghan refugees in large numbers resulted into a nexus between local and international terrorists (Ali, 2021, 68). However, Shaikh argues that establishment played a vital role in using religion as a tool to counter and suppress the Sindhi nationalism in Sindh (Ali, 2021, 70).

During the war on terror, TTP's version of Jihad was instrumental in tarnishing the socio-economic fabric of Karachi through suicide attacks and target killings particularly during 2013 general election campaign in which they killed political workers of major secular political parties, including PPP, ANP and MQM. (Ali, 2021, 71).

Religious groups help the common people residing in rural areas of Sindh to further strengthen their love for these religious groups because of their relief and rehabilitation activities. Due to these activities they were willing to send their young children studying in madrassas to join hands with such sectarian groups (Ali, 2021, 66) It was not only madrassas' students, but young generation from well-reputed institutions belonging to wealthy families are also becoming radicalized and extremist. Noreen Laghari of Hyderabad, belonging to well-educated family, was caught in Lahore when she was on her way to join the Islamic State (IS). The example of Saad Aziz, a graduate of Institute of Business administration (IBA), an elite business school, in Karachi who was involved in Safoora goth carnage, was also of this kind, who alongwith his group was radicalized by ideology of Islamic

State (IS) through social media propaganda in campus. He, later on admitted many target killings and bomb blasts (Khan, 2015; Tanoli, 2015). Similarly, the attackers of Karachi dockyard were also educated and radicalized while serving in the Pakistan Navy.

Asghar Somroo claims that establishing of madrassas and their mushroom growth is a result of "state policy to counter Sindhi nationalism through religious thoughts" (quoted in Ali, 2021, 75). Whereas, Riaz Suhail has a different opinion as he claimed that these madrassas would be used on one side for converting Hindus to Muslims and on the other side in case of war in bordering area, these would be working as front line defence line for Pakistan against Indian aggression/ invasion. (quoted in Ali, 2021, 75) However, the above mentioned incidents shows that on one hand, religious seminaries, and on the other hand, modern educational institutions of higher learning such as IBA, NED and University of Karachi are becoming breeding ground of religious extremism.

During the last phases of War against Terrorism, a new religious phenomenon of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) emerged in Pakistani political scenario with the aim of protection of the Honour of Last Prophet (PBUH) in the wake of Blasphemy Laws. This phenomenon, on the one hand, disrupted the peace of Karachi city, and on the other hand, destroyed the peace of the country by mass demonstrations across the country on many occasions. The winning of two Provincial Assembly seats in Sindh province and third position in many other provincial constituencies makes it not merely a religious force but also a large and vital political force across the state. In NA 200, Larkana, MMA candidate, Rahid Mhmood Soomro got more than 50000 votes against Bilawal Bhutto, Chairman PPP in 2018 general election (Geo, 2018). This huge number of vote secured by religious political parties' candidate in home town of PPP is a clear cut manifestation of success of religious political parties in Northern Sindh. This trend also shows how much people love the Holy Prophet (PBUH) that within a short span of time, a purely religious group formed on the basis of blasphemy laws got the attention of people as a political force as well. TLP electoral popularity and its huge demonstrations across Pakistan make the state unable to ban them from taking part into the election in spite of the fact that they was banned for taking part in the election under anti-terrorism law by the government (Dawn, 2021) However, they did not only contest the election but also got a large number of votes. (Waseem, 2021) As per news reports, the government did not only release their jailed activists but also allowed TLP to take part in the election (Business Recorder, 2021) This clearly shows the ineffectiveness and inability of government to work against a banned organization, as of fear of public pressure because the government knows their ban might not be justified.

Hindus are one of the largest minority groups of Pakistan and mostly living in Sindh. There are complaints, in recent past, regarding forced conversion. Mian Abdul Khaliq (Alias Mian Mitho) was allegedly involved in such conversion of Minor Hindu girls in Northern Sindh. Similarly, in Karachi, Christian community is subject to forced conversion. Faisal Edhi also pointed out this by claiming that Hindu girls are being converted to Islam to get married with Muslim boys and later on treated badly by their in laws (Ali, 2021, 73).

Similarly, Jamshoro that was once a hub of academic and intellectual activities is converted into a religious sectarian hub with entrance of religious politics in student politics of the universities of Jamshoro. The case of Dr. Arfana Mallah, professor in Sindh University, Jamshoro, was a vital example of radicalized society. She was threatened and harassed on accusation of blasphemy and nobody in the society could rescue her due to pressure of religious factor. (Ali, 2021, 71-72)

Sectarian tension between Barelvis and Deobandis can be seen in Larakana in the wake of bomb blast to kill Peer ghulam Hussain Shah Bukhari, a spiritual leader. The shrine of Lal shehba Qalander has been a place of sectarian and religious harmony since many centuries but this place could not be spared from attack with the possible involvement of Hafeez Barohi Group. (Ali, 2021,75).

However, religion is not the only factor in extremism. The state failure to provide the people basic necessities of life is a major problem. Poverty is also one of the major reasons of extremism in Sindh as almost 70% people of rural area of Sindh live below poverty line (Hussain, Qureshi & Hussain, 2019). The state is responsible for providing free education to the children aged 5 to 16 according to Article 25A of the Constitution of Pakistan. However, the state is unable to fulfill its constitutional duty and around 66 million children are out of school in Sindh province alone (Ali, 2021,77). They can be easy recruits for extremism and violence.

The Role of Mosque

Many academicians have written and discussed about the role of madrassas (religious seminaries) (Looney, 2003; Malik, 2007; McClure, 2009; Qadri, 2018; Hanif, Ali &Shaheen, 2019; Butt, 2020). Much work has been done on madrassas (religious seminaries) but no work has been done on mosques. Madrassa is an educational institution whereas mosque is place of worship. In madrassas, selective people can have access and specific students study whereas mosque is open place and common people are visiting mosques regularly. Mosque is a place where Muslims gather five times a day for worship and on Friday for weekly gathering/prayer. Mosque is identified as a place of peace and moderation in Quran, Holy book of Muslims. The highest stage of moderation for a Muslim is the Piousness (Tak'wa). The most moderate (pious) person is assigned the duty of imam (guardian or leader of the mosque). Mosque is an effective tool in Muslim society to create tolerance and peace. Imam is also a vital factor in both societies as he plays vital role in shaping the public opinion in many matters particularly, the religious matters.

Although Mosque is a place of worship, but traditionally/ historically, during the time of Holy Prophet (PBUH), it was used to discuss the social, security, economic and management maters of the individuals and state. (Razak, Hussein, & Muhammad, 2014). With the passage of time the role of mosques has changed. Moreover, In Pakistan, the state administration has no or little authority on the administration of mosque affairs.

Ammad-ul-Haque in his paper studied the Friday sermons of 80 Jamia mosques in Pakistan, 10 from each city (Haque, 2021,190) and 40 Friday sermons from West. Mosques play vital role in the societies particularly in avoiding extremism and in promoting community resilience. In both, Western and Eastern Society, the mosques play vital role not only in mitigating the extremism but also avoiding it. The study

focuses on Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar and Karachi from Eastern part and London, New York, Ottawa and Paris from the Western part. (Haque, 2021,187) The study points out that the Pakistani mosques are deeply connected with issue of sectarianism because of the lack of administerial checks. Whereas, in Western states, imams of mosques are subject to administerial checks. In Pakistan, there is no central mechanism for regulating the mosques. Only self-regulated system governed by mosque committee composed/ consisted of local people or the imam himself is regulating all the affairs of his mosque including financial matters. Only the mosques of Defence Housing Authority (DHA) is an example where the DHA controlling the sectarian factor by promoting a slogan "All Mosques for All Muslims" (Haque, 2021, 191).

In Pakistan no mechanism of hiring and firing of Imam exits at state level. However, in Western societies specially in European countries, they have legal check on imams, who can be deported on anti-state or radical speeches. 12 Imams were deported from France in 2004 and 50 imams were deported from UK in 2005 (Haque, 2021,192) In Europe, training of Imams is a common feature by conducting workshops and seminars. Whereas, in Pakistan, no such system of training of Imams exists. The study of Asgher (n.d) also analyzes Friday sermons, which are considered as the key driver in terms of ideological indoctrination and sectarian hatred.

Generally, mosques are working peacefully and imam enjoys respect in the society. A large number of mosques in Pakistan were established in the name of a religious school of thought or a particular sect. An expert pointed out, "it is rare one can find a mosque in Pakistan without any sectarian affiliation because sect names are being preferred to the name of Allah Almighty in establishing the mosques". (quoted in Haque, 2021,191) There are numerous examples where a new mosque is established in an area especially on the basis of sect (Haque, 2021,191).

Mosques played vital role in mitigating the ethno-linguistic intolerance and violence because people belonging to different ethnic and language groups are used to offer prayer under one roof behind one imam. So that is the positive side/role of the mosque in both Eastern and Western societies. In Pakistan literacy rate is low, especially among ulemas in Pakistan. Whereas, European people talk about their respective school of thoughts, due to high literacy rate, with arguments. (Haque, 2021, 191).

Fatwa and CVE

Fatwa is a source of Islamic Legal Theory. (Asghar a, n.d. 5) Fatwa is also known as legal verdicts or opinion on any point of law ((Asghar a, n.d, 6; Islam, 1996). Fatwas are sometimes issued to distinct among believers and non-believers. The research of Asgher (n.d) explains the relationship between religious extremism and Fatwa (a religious decree in Islam issued by a religious scholar) by explaining how fatwas are affecting the minds of people by constructing social realities around different religious narratives in general and sectarian narrative in particular. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is adopted as research methodology for this study.

Extremism is so much engraved in our society that the religious scholars are calling others of Islamic community as "Kafir" (infidel, non-believer) without any rationale

and good reason.9 Infidel is the English word for the Urdu word "کافر".) (Asghar a, n.d., 3) Saiful Anam, an Idonnesian religious scholar, branded the all government officials of law enforcing agencies as infidels (Asghar a, n.d., 7). There are many cases where Fatawa were issued by the individuals of a particular sect or sub sect to legitimize and validate the act of violence without any rationale. The Fatwa issued by religious scholars on killing of Salamn Taseer by calling him a blashpahemer (Suleman, 2018; Asghar a, n.d.,7)

Asgher (n.d) has studied thoroughly the fatawa issued by different religious scholars belonging to different religious seminaries across Pakistan such as Fatwa Daul Ullom Karachi by Maulana Mufti Muhammad Rafi Usmani, Grand Mufti of Deoband School of Thought; Tafheem ul Masail by Prof Mufti Muneeb ur Rehman, President Sunni (Barelvi) School of Thought; Fatawa Haqqania by Maulana Sami ul Haq Shaheed, Deoband School of Thought; Fatawa Darul Uloom Naeemia by Allama Mufti Muhammad Abdul Aleem Sialvi, Sunni (Barelvi) School of Thought; Fatawa Usmani by Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, Deoband School of Thought etc.(Asghar a, n.d.,10) It is common perception that the religious extremism is manifested in fatwas issued by religious scholars whereas, in contrast, majority of fatwas studied for this research have nothing to do with religious extremism. (Asghar a, n.d.,18) Rather there are a number of Fatawa that forbid the violence and extremism. Tahir ul qadri (2009) was the first one who pronounced that suicide bombing and terrorism is strictly prohibited in Islam in the light of Quran and Sunnah and declared terrorists as *Kharijites* (Ahmed, Sajid & Ashraf, 2021, 34). Pagham-e-Pakistan is also one of its kind fatwa that was signed by a large number of ulemas form different sects and all of them unanimously emphasized peace and tolerance in the society and prohibited violence.

Role of Religious Scholars

The religious scholars holds prominent position in any Muslim society in general and in Pakistan in Particular. Since the inception of Pakistan, religious leaders, religious scholars and religion have pertinent role in the affairs of Pakistan. Religion is considered as one of the important parts of anyone's life across the globe. Hassan in his doctoral research also discussed the role of religious leaders in CVE in Kenya and concludes that religious leaders can play very effective role in CVE through community resilience and peace building (Hassan, 2017). The USIP Special Report 413 also elaborates that religious leaders are potential drivers of violence and extremism and they can play a vital role both in conflict and peace. (Mandaville, Peter and Melissa Nozell, 2017; Ahmed, Sajid & Ashraf, 2021, 32).

One of the examples in which one individual drives the whole community by using his religious position is of Molve Fazalullah. Molvi Fazalullah was the local Taliban leader and hailed from Dir. He, along with his followers announced the implementation of Sharia Law particularly in Dir and Swat and a large number of his followers accepted his notion and the area became the hotbed of terrorism and extremism. Resultantly, the Pakistan Army launched military operation in the area to counter it.

Ahmad, Sajid and Ashraf (2021) conclude that religious leaders have played positive role in CVE by taking different measures such as enhancing social cohesion among community members. Their research divided the religious leaders in two categories; *Alim* (religious scholar) and *Imam Masjid*. He points out that role of

Imam masjid is not as important as the role of Alim is. Inspite of the fact that Imam Masjid has regular contact with society due to five times prayer in a day, the role of Imam Masjid is passive in CVE. Whereas the Alim has more active role in CVE due to his political affiliations and more influence over the society.

This research shows that an overwhelmingly large number of respondents do not only follow their religious leaders but also learn explanations from weekly sermons of imam Masjid (Asghar, n.d,13). Some of the respondents of this research are of the view that mostly religious leaders were not vocal about the issue of violence and extremism during the peak of terrorism in the area due to one or the other reason, such as fear of TTP. Religious leaders were threatened by the local police to keep them on their side whereas on the other hand they were threatened by the Taliban to keep them on their side (Ahmed, Sajid & Ashraf, 2021, 41). In short, in most cases the religious leaders did not perform their active role by preferring to keep quite on the issue of extremism and violent extremism particularly during war on terror. This situation has created a confusion among the society as in the absence of any religious guidance they were unguided and without a proper direction on the issue of CVE.

The researchers also identified that the failure of CVE in this area is also due to non-engagement of religious leaders by the government as they have ignored them and did not provide them patronage in the efforts of CVE in spite of the fact that the people of this area are more religious and more inclined towards the teachings of religious leaders.

Role of Sufi Saints

The land of Sindh has always been tolerant, peaceful and respectful. Traditionally, Sindh has been known as soil of brotherhood, love, peace, religious and communal harmony. Historically, the Sufism of Sindh was influenced by the traditions of major local religions, like Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. These characteristics helped the people of Sindh in countering violence and extremism by creating community resilience. Sufism promotes liberal traditions and practices and this liberal face allows them to have peaceful and tolerant followers with the nature of acceptability and acceptance for others. They are known for spreading/promoting the moderate values in the society. Sufism is a bond between common men and Sufi Saints. One of the Sufi followers claimed, "Sufism is like spiritual science which can utilized universally for making and maintaining peace, order and human welfare". (Narejo, N. B & Mahesar A. H, n.d, 13). Sufi saints are considered as the spiritual leaders playing a vital role in creating community resilience against violent extremism.

The Sufism can be traced in Asian sub-continent back in 11th century. (Narejo, N. B & Mahesar A. H, n.d, 14). The Sufis promoted the concept of Oneness of Allah that further developed and strengthened the concept of "oneness of human brotherhood". (Narejo, N. B & Mahesar A. H, n.d, 11). The role of sufi saints is very vital in Community Resilience against violent extremism in Sindh. Sufism of Sindh is a very unique phenomenon in Sindh and mostly people believe in this phenomenon. The teachings and life of Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalander, Bhittae and Hazrat Sachal Sarmast play very vital role in spreading the message of tolerance among different communities in Sindh for many centuries. These are considered as three vital pillars of Sufism in Sindh (Narejo, N. B & Mahesar A. H, n.d, 2). Qalander stayed in Sindh only for one year but the impact of his teaching was very influential in the thinking

of the people of Sindh (Narejo, & Mahesar, n.d,15). Another follower is of the view that "The Sufi practice of Sachal Sarmast attracted me because it was based on submission, humbleness and mutual respect". (Narejo, & Mahesar, n.d, 13). Sufism promotes homogeneity, humanism and universal values through sufi teachings of rhythm, music (rag) and dance. Sufi saints are also known as healers of human diseases and maladies (Narejo, & Mahesar, n.d, 15). Levesque (2016) worked on the sufism of Sindh and he is of the opinion that "Sindhis are Sufis by nature". One of the practicing Sufi singers claimed, "Sufi Saints are the spiritual healers of the spiritual illness" (Narejo, & Mahesar, n.d, 12). These sufi saints used different instruments/ medium such as rhythm, kalam, music and dance to heal spiritual powers among their followers as these instruments attract the common people towards peaceful message and make them strong against extremism, terrorism and violence.

One of the features of Sufism is to educate all people without discriminating them on the basis of cast, creed and culture. They are known as the champion of pluralism so that the heterogeneous society can survive peacefully. The Western societies have demonstrated that unity is strength because in those heterogeneous societies people belonging to any cast, creed, religion or culture enjoy the same opportunities and privileges without any discrimination. This is how they made a black American president, an Indian origin politician British Prime Minister, and a Pakistan origin individual Scotland's First Minister.

One person praised the Sufis by claiming, "The Sufi Saints in Sindh have always spread the message of love, peace, tolerance and mutual co-existence. The common men have been benefited from the message of the Sufis to a greater extent. However, some sectors of communities have benefited more than others. Some elements are still involved in violence out of hatred or lack of awareness of the Sufi message". (Narejo, & Mahesar, n.d, 14).

The Sindh and its population have no history or traditions of attacking others. The people of Sindh believe that Sufi practices are the instruments to spread peace and tolerance. The global peace and order can possibly be achieved through such teachings. Sufi teachings are to uplift the common men's welfare and this is the one way to counter the extremism and intolerance as they are not in favour of radical or revolutionary changes rather they are in favour of some structural and ideological changes.

Sindh has a culture of tolerance. Females use to perform *Dhamal* with men and spreading the message of sufi saints. The "Kalam" of Sachal Sarmast and Shah Latif is full of resistance against religious extremism. (Ali, 2021,78).

Wies (2020) describes that the poetry of Sachal Sarmast depicts the criticism of fundamentalism and orthodoxy in the society (write few verses) and he opines that establishment and rigid molvi nexus has been stumbling block in the progress of our society. (Weiss, 2020, 45-47; Ali, 2021, 78).

Impediments in development work: religious factors

Many scholars believe that development organizations work in the fields where state is unable to perform easily so it might be replacing state in such areas. (Bano, 2008; Bradley, 2006; Kamat, 2003), (Beath, 2015; Roff, 2004; Ulleberg, 2009). The projects such as building of roads, infrastructure, sanitation facilities, clean drinking

water were not resisted by the Pashtun society because these don't challenge the religious myths or traditional values of the society. The Pashtun society uses to resist such projects where they feel threat to their culture and values (Illich, 1968 and Kamat, 2002). Both national and international aid has been as skeptical among nationalist and religious leaders of Pashtun area (Husain, 1979; (Asghar, n.d, 4).

Religion plays vital role in the life of aid worker particularly in developing states. (Fountain, 2013; (Asghar, n.d, -4). Clerics are even not happy with NGOs and therefore pessimistic about their development program particularly in Pashtun areas. Reason for one criticism is the amalgamation of male and female in such development organizations because in religio-cultural context, it is prohibited. (Asghar, n.d, 9).

Asgher (n.d, 10,11) in his quantitative research shows that mostly respondents consider the NGOs as Western agents due to their funding from Jews and Christians of the West and these are the instruments through which they are promulgating the Western culture in general and vulgarity in particular that are threatening the local Pashtun culture.

Conclusion

Ever increasing religious extremism is posing existential threat to Pakistan particularly its peace and economic progress. Policy of successive governments to use Islam does not only produce issues such as sectarianism and extremism but also produce hurdles in making the society pluralistic, tolerant and peaceful. The economic and social growth has been compromised due to this ever increasing sectarian and religious violence. Every member of youth whether in madrassas or in school or college or in university or even in armed forces have chances of radicalization and this is what threatening Pakistan internal security and stability as we have all examples without any exception.

The Sindh's culture of pluralistic society demands countering violent extremism through promoting the messages of tolerance, peace, love, acceptance for others and interfaith harmony propagated/ taught by Sufis of Sindh. And this can be done by providing economic opportunities to the neglected people such as support of small loans, technical trainings and community mobilization on one hand and through inclusive education, films, dramas, music, performing arts and poetry. As these all tested tolls and were very effective against extremism. Sindh is also a victim of extremism and terrorism just like other parts of Pakistan due to multiple factors such as communal riots, Kashmir issue, Afghan war, 9/11 and war against terrorism. The international terrorist's groups like Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda had strong connections in Pakistan in general and in Karachi in particular.

Ali (2021) claims that contradictory policies of the state by taking strict measures as per the guideline of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on one hand and patronage of TLP and Afghan Taliban on the other hand. Peaceful, tolerant and multicultural Sindh has been turned into a violent and extremist region due to sectarian and religious factors. Muslims are not only killing and targeting Non-Muslims but also Muslims as well due to sectarian issue. Religion is compromised, misinterpreted, misused and jeopardised by many individual and the state itself and even by successive governments. Abdul Basit (2015) points out that "environment-

focused counter-radicalization strategies" and "individual-focused de-radicalization" are needed in the context of Pakistan for CVE. (quoted in Ahmed, Sajid & Ashraf, 2021, 33). The successful example of such strategy is adopted in Dir. In the initial stage of war on Terror, Dir valley, an area of Swat, did not resisted against extremist elements but later on, the area gave strong resistance to extremist elements by establishing "local Peace Committees". The most modern approach to counter extremism is Sufism.

Recommendations

In Pakistan, the Imams can be asked to advocate nationalism, spread tolerance and peace, ideal parentage, social welfare, reducing domestic violence, female education, anti-corruption, self-accountability, social justice through Friday sermons on the pattern of Turkey and Netherlands where Imams use to advocate nationalism.

The poetry, teaching and Sufi practices of Sufi saints such as Sachal and Bhittae can be incorporated in the curriculum at school, college and university level.

The spreading of Sufi messages through different sources among population in general and youth in particular.

In Pakistan, the training of imam must be initiated to make them aware from contemporary social issues of the society

Researches to be conducted to understand the depth of Sufi messages.
A national narrative is needed against extremism and terrorism to counter extremism
Text book chapter on peace and tolerance
Parliamentary debates for discourse on counter terrorism
Strict implementation of National Action Plan (NAP)
Fatwas should be regularized and monitored by the government.
Avoid using the vague terms such as "Islamic terrorism", "religious extremism", "Islamophobia"
More active engagements of the religious leaders for CVE
Monitoring of Friday sermons free from sectarian issues
The state must devise different programs to educate the masses to clear their misperceptions about NGOs and programs like family planning, polio and development programs.
A strategy must be adopted by the policy makers to understand the local culture when implementing the different projects and programs.

The mind set of clerics must be understood so that they can be educate and trained to change their pre-determined perception of such clerics.

Religious scholars must be used by the government and the state to mobilize people for preventive and countering violent extremism because people particularly follow the religious scholars in Pakistan.

There is a dire need to understand the real teachings of Islam in the light of teaching of Quran and Sunnah.

The people of Sindh believes that Sufism practices are one of the instruments to spread peace and tolerance. The global peace and order can possibly be achieved through such teachings. (can be added in conclusion)

The tools of soft power such as economic incentives and political inclusion can be used to counter extremism.

Improving the governance style, governance reforms, enhancing the institutional capacity, rule of law, self-accountability, right of fair trial, social justice, economic equality, transparency and many other such steps can help in combating violent extremism.

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