

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

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This research article seeks to explore the relationship between extremism and social critical integration with particular emphasis on the role played by the university in this dynamic. In this research, the methodology allows an in-depth analysis of the socio-political and economic factors leading to the rise of extremism and the effectiveness of university-led interventions. It is found that, through inclusive curriculum designs, open dialogue, and community activities, universities can substantially contribute to social critical integration and hence enhance resilience against extremist influence. Key insights from the study indicate that such universities, by their strong educational frameworks and proactive policies, may be very rich in generating pivotal platforms for countering extremism. They host successful models of interdisciplinary training programs on peace and conflict studies, student-led positive initiatives that bring intercultural understanding, and civic cohesion through university-community partnerships. This research concludes with the presentation of some policy recommendations on how universities can be maximally deployed to prevent extremism. These include the integration of critical pedagogy, expansion in community

Abid

outreach, and an inclusive academic environment. Such emphasis on Transformative Potential in Higher Education: Using present research underpins the role played by universities in building a cohesive, tolerant, resilient society for Pakistan.

Keywords: *Extremism, Social Critical Integration, Intercultural Understanding, Community Engagement, Policy Recommendation*

INTRODUCTION

A major consequence of political, social, religious, linguistic, and regional sectarianism, extremism, or intolerance is in the form of fighting, anarchy, bigotry, hatred, anger, and rebellion. Similarly, another big result of this thinking comes out in the form of incidents based on terrorism after extremism. Extremism is one of the major challenges that our state is currently facing. Because we are very much divided on a political, social, and religious basis and because of this division, where the distance between different parties has widened at different levels, it is also natural for conflicts to arise between them.

The narrative of extremism is not new but has been politically cultivated in our policies for decades. When we use extremism practically as a weapon, it does not result in any way in the interest of the state and its citizens. Extremism is the process with the help of which people with extreme and eccentric views, exclude other individuals from society, use violent actions, make dramatic changes in the community stop social integration

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

that results in conflict. Based on Schmid's (2013) definition, extremism refers to an ideology or practice that seeks to destabilize society by disseminating strident fault lines and engaging in acts of violence that are contrary to the general welfare of society. Related to the issue of political violence, different authors have pointed to the connection between various grievances and the rise of radical groups; such grievances might be political, economic, and social (Neumann, 2013).

In general, the challenges faced by the rationalist narrative or the state cannot be met simply based on force or guns; we must treat these problems on an educational and intellectual front. Because unless we diagnose the disease correctly, it cannot be treated better and effectively. To counter extremism, the state needs an alternative narrative that is effective against the negative narrative already in play and establishes its political and social credibility among the people. Our universities or educational institutions play a key role in shaping the narrative. Universities that are primarily connected with research activities and where research is the basis and alternative thinking and thought are brought forward, including dialogue. The role of universities is to review the existing policies at the state level and to support policies, legislation, or implementation systems. Journalists argue that VE groups often exploit the vacuum left by the student unions (Shah, 2015). They continue to influence and recruit vulnerable youth by supporting their mechanisms through in-person or virtual peer groups and

Abid

usually play upon cultural, social, religious, or economic divides among the targeted youth, fueling hate and intolerance (PU, 2020).

Kymlicka (2012) argues that effective integration requires a commitment to social justice and the recognition of diverse identities within a cohesive society. It is also possible to formulate a curriculum, familiarizing students with critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and the phenomena of extremism governing the modern world of universities. In the analysis of extremism, academic research offers best practices for prevention and combating causes and effects of extremism. Through interdisciplinary research, universities can study extremism together with the problems of social inequality and integration (Busher et al., 2019). Towards the realization of social cohesion and sustainability against radicalization, universities can volunteer their services in engaging with the surrounding communities. This can be done by establishing contact and communication, (Davies, 2018). giving public speeches, as well as by cooperating with organizations of specific communities Universities are capable of researching how extremism arises and whether it has motivations and it has a political, social, religious, and economic background. Many student society strengthening initiatives have been at various public and private sector universities in Punjab (PU, 2020). Although at the government or state level, we have four important documents to combat extremism. First, the existence of a national action plan for the elimination of extremism and terrorism, second, the message of Pakistan

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

for the elimination of communal problems, and the inclusion of women in the elimination of extremism with the “Dukhtaran-e- Pakistan program” and Fourth Security Policy are included. Based on these four documents, we not only fight extremism, but also create the thought and concern of respect for each other on political, social, and religious grounds in all sections of the society.

In 2016, the Punjab Higher Education Commission (PHEC) convened a conference of Vice-Chancellors to discuss VE issues openly at the campuses and suggest ways to design and implement peacebuilding programs at the campuses. The conference comes up with a set of 34 recommendations to help curtail issues of VE. Amongst others, one of the recommendations was to strengthen the student societies and clubs to sustain their constructive engagement to desist students from extremist narratives (Muneer & Naz, 2019).

The strength of the political and social structures of Pakistan and the advancement of academic and intellectual endeavors in them is given great importance to the narratives that emerge from the universities. A general opinion is that when alternative thinking and thought in universities gets state recognition, it has a major effect in the form of positive aspects at the national level. When we talk about the development and protection of the common man in the country, it does not mean just boys or men but also includes girls and women, minorities, transgenders, persons with disabilities, or other underprivileged sections. We have to understand

Abid

that women are also involved in issues like peace, intolerance, tolerance, and acceptance. Women are also needed for peace and without political, social, economic, or legal protection neither women can get protection nor women can play an effective role in overall national development including national or social development. Issues related to intolerance, extremism, or extremism are having a major impact on women's lives as well and as a result, they are also feeling insecure. Another reason for this is the absence of an effective system for the full implementation of the fundamental rights in the Constitution of Pakistan which practically guarantee the rights of women.

Now the question arises how we find a cure for this disease or what is the strategy for it that can take us out of extremism and turn it into a peaceful Pakistan? For this, we have to pay attention to four basic issues. First, this problem should be recognized at the state level that extremism is our biggest challenge, and it is part of our state or government priorities. It is this strong political commitment that can give us the way forward. Secondly, we also have to recognize that a major reason for the crisis of extremism is our pre-existing policies, legislative implementation system, and many intellectual contradictions and problems that have created this crisis. Thirdly, we also have to understand why our education and training system could not make possible political, social, and religious acceptance of each other including tolerance, peace, and mutual harmony among people. By accepting this patch, we can find a solution to these

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

problems with the help of educational institutions. Fourthly, to ensure this, if we want to protect society from extremism, we have to focus on the new generation or youth group, including both boys and girls and make them part of our top priority. So that we can build the future and move forward. In this process, where the new youths have to be given strength, we need new young teachers, including male & female. In this connection, some initiatives were taken by the authorities that support the objective.

A general opinion is that our new generation is increasing in extremism tendencies, and they want to impose their views on others based on extremism rather than dialogue. Some scholars and intellectuals have called this war a generational war or a global hybrid war. The premise is that our new generation is moving away from dialogue, and they believe that their real strength is the presence of force instead of dialogue. Another problem to be understood is that the politics of reaction is increasing in our state governance and people do not hesitate to give their immediate positive or negative reactions and not to follow the actions of individuals or institutions for no reason. It is for this reason that when reactionary politics proceeds, its reaction will be negative. But we forget how this reactionary politics is being created in the new generation. One of the main reasons for this is our governance and not paying attention to the problems of the new generation especially the policy of distrust in the state and government system including the uncertainty

Abid

found in them. Therefore, if we want to promote peaceful politics and society in the new generation, then we have to make infrastructure in our governance system and make the implementation system efficient and transparent. By saying good things or presenting a negative image of them, any strategy to eliminate extremism will not be effective. We also have to understand the new generation and the problems of the new generation, we have to get out of the old and outdated thinking and should understand the issues from a new angle and move forward by understanding others as well.

The globalization process brought some new standards and requirements for education and training in modern society. As Rahman noted, it is important to synchronize curricula with their international counterparts and develop intercultural skills since people become a part of a global economy. Changes in demographics and call center labor market needs, people needed calling training. Another trend rising to prominence and is emphasized very keenly to meet the contemporary challenges is soft skills, entrepreneurship, and innovation as marked by Naviwala (2016). In our universities, we need to create a strategy going forward with a complete diversity mindset and concern. Because now our society has practically a comprehensive structure. Our universities have divisions based on every language speaker, every region or province, and every religion or sect. There are students from Balochi, Saraiki, Sindhi, Punjabi, Urdu, Gilgit, Kashmir, FATA and Waziristan.

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

On this basis, when we look at the divisions, their political, social, economic, administrative, and religious problems are also different. Especially youth from small areas are more sensitive and perceive that state policies and practices discriminate against them based on their region or language. This is the reason why we have an atmosphere of extremism among the youth at the university level.

Ensuring security at the level of students or administration is also a big challenge. Universities are a center of teaching and learning where students who have different ideas and thoughts learn not only for themselves but also for others by creating a favorable and intellectual environment and foundation there. Provide opportunities for everyone to be a part of learning from each other. Everyone can't have the same thoughts and ideas, it is natural for them to have different thoughts and ideas. But this should not mean that we cannot sit together and work together or respect each other's thoughts and opinions. Today's digital world has offered a wealth of information to the new generation. People are learning a lot of new things with the help of these digital platforms and the new knowledge is giving them political and social awareness as well as raising questions in them. Having questions is itself a reflection of a good society. But it seems that we generally don't like questions or hearing questions of our own is part of our strategy. The non-acceptance of various questions that are different from our thinking and this concern has also created problems for us on many levels.

Abid

Similarly, a fundamental problem would be to understand that a question is just a question and to say that why the question is not correct reflects wrong thinking. If someone thinks that the question is pointless, then instead of getting angry, an alternative answer should be presented, not the thoughts and concerns of the dialogue should be closed, or his feelings should be broken, and the result would be a deadlock in dialogue that would certainly not reflect civilized societies.

The role of our education system and universities is linked to the point of playing a key role in bridging the divides in society that can bring people together despite their different ideas and thinking. This supportive environment involves us being polite, tolerant, and respectful of each other's opinions. We not only give information and knowledge to the new generation but also try to give a positive shape to their political, civic, religious, and social attitudes. Instead of the major trends based on hatred, bigotry, anger, rebellion, and extremism, it is to create the thought and concern that we are Pakistanis and our first and foremost interest is the development of Pakistan, security, independence, and a better national image. We have to prioritize a narrative or an agenda in front of the new generation that is not only taking them to get a degree but also imparting in them the thought and concern that their collective role is more important than their role. Where they do not change themselves, but by changing others, progress is made towards social development.

The politics of hate and especially such hateful

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

content in the educational environment or in their curriculum, whether it is passive or non-reactive, should not be encouraged at any level and any compromise on this should not be our strategy. We have to include the weak and deprived sections of the society, including young boys and girls, and other sections, including transgender, minorities or non-Muslims, in the stream of collective development and we should disagree with the point of view that they would be doubted on their nationalism or patriotism or do not consider them as better Pakistanis. All the people who are part of this state irrespective of their religion they should not be doubted, nor should we treat them as second-class citizens.

If we want to make educational institutions or universities a part of our priorities, we have to pay special attention to the following measures and these measures should be visible and transparent at all levels, including our policies and legislation, at the level of university governance. Universities have to take the lead on this important narrative of extremism, and the universities must also take the lead in such a way that they make all parties part of this movement so that we not only in the universities but also in the societal extremis. It is not only to eliminate favouritism, but also to make the narrative on peace and tolerance a part of national priorities. We have to present the new generation as well as teachers belonging to the new generation as great ambassadors in the process of peace and tolerance. When the students and teachers associated with the universities present

Abid

themselves as a big role model, the result will not be limited only to the universities but also outside the universities, it will have a positive effect on us at the social level as well.

Basically, federal and provincial higher education commissions, heads of universities, deans and heads of departments, student-related educational societies, teachers, federal and provincial ministers of higher education and secretaries all need an important unity and this challenge of extremism should also feature prominently in their academic and intellectual priorities.

Awareness of State and Government Policies, Laws, International Laws and Regulations

Pakistan has several policies or laws at the state government and institutional level that focus on an alternative narrative to extremism. Among them are the Zakat National Action Plan, the Message for the Elimination of Communal Issues, the National Security Policy, including the Girls of Pakistan, for the inclusion of women by “Dukhtaran-e-Pakistan” and simultaneously, there are laws and policies for the elimination of hateful content and there are also some international norms that we are obliged to follow to disseminate all this information and make it a part of the education system. Based on this, we have to play the role of a responsible Pakistani, and neither should we encourage any action or initiative that creates anxiety, chaos, tension and hatred in the society. It must therefore be recognized that we need a massive literacy campaign at the level of educational institutions to promote the narrative of peace as opposed

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

to extremism.

Sustaining Fundamental Changes in the Education Curriculum

We need fundamental changes in the curriculum based on the content that will keep us away from extremism and reflect in our curriculum a reflection that discourages extremist tendencies among people. For this, we need to re-examine the existing curriculum and analyze it on a critical basis, firstly to weed out material that encourages extremist tendencies and secondly to introduce new material as an alternative curriculum that focuses on important issues like political, social integration and tolerance should be preferred over the existing curriculum. Instability in the political systems due to regular shift in governments hampers educational planning and policy making and execution (Naviwala, 2016).

Some fundamental changes are required at the curricular level and some informally content that can highlight new information, new knowledge, and new thinking and different angles of thought has to be part of the course. Similarly, there is a lot of material available in publication to ensure political, social and religious integration at the level of civil society and this material also needs to be taken up at the level of universities.

In 2017, Interior Minister chaired a conference of 70 universities and stressed taking up measures to step up anti-radicalization measures, including strengthening of

Abid

student societies and clubs (Khan, 2017). The models or strategies that have been adopted to end extremism by basing the educational system or the educational curriculum in the outside world, we have to take advantage of them and connect them with the strategies of our educational curriculum. Similarly, in today's world, there has been a great revolution in the digital world and there are videos, documentaries, dramas, films, skits, songs or music, and animation-based content that need to be consulted to benefit. It should be connected with our curriculum either directly or indirectly.

The Process of Training, Modern Worlds and New Narratives

Training plays an important role in the education system. In general, there is a lot of emphasis on teacher training. At the level of the Higher Education Commission and also at the level of universities, we are seeing the process of teacher training with consistency. In this training process, we have to introduce new dimensions in our training programs to eradicate extremism and create social cohesion. This training should be highlighted in the teachers, based on the current curricular or extra-curricular or non-formal curriculum or with their behavior and attitudes, the aspects of peacefulness, tolerance, and respect for each other's views can be imparted.

In these training programs, including various academic experts, experts working on a practical basis at the security and social or political level should also be invited and their experience should also be utilized to better

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

understand how to benefit from this training process.

The globalization process brought some new standards and requirements for education and training in modern society. As Rahman noted, it is important to synchronize curricula with their international counterparts and develop intercultural skills since people become a part of a global economy. Changes in demographics and call center labor market needs, people needed calling training. Another trend rising to prominence and is emphasized very keenly to meet the contemporary challenges is soft skills, entrepreneurship, and innovation as marked by Naviwala (2016). A holistic training curriculum should be developed to empower teachers to carry out their work more effectively and the training should be frequent and not limited to one or two courses. It should also include innovations and allow them to refer to courses in different periods. Similarly, this training should be done for students at the university level and in this, specially selected boys and girls who can change themselves with the help of this training and also have a practical training program to change others. On an annual basis, the universities take young people through a course in the process of peace and tolerance that can present them as ambassadors of peace. In the same training process, teachers and students should also be given visits to various institutions that are designed to combat extremism so that everyone can get an opportunity to learn from each other's experiences. In particular, they should be trained to develop such a research process at the

Abid

level of students to understand what are the motivations that promote extremist worlds and how to reduce them.

The Need for Dialogue in Educational Institutions

There is a need for a big dialogue in the context of spreading peace and tolerance in educational institutions. This dialogue is also important because by making it the basis, we may try to find solutions to the problems by making all the parties involved in this national debate. Because the culture of dialogue will cause the birth of new arguments in the new generation. This thought and concern that what is being thought from the surface is what we have to impose on everyone without any dialogue or consultation should end. The process of dialogue is also necessary so that those who have different thoughts and opinions should generalize the culture of discussion with their concerns and people should be given the freedom to say whatever they want to say. Because when we lock the process of speaking out based on oppression and fear it empowers the peace debate itself.

The work of the institutions is to present new thinking, research, and alternative narratives in comparison to traditional and extremist narratives. Based on this thinking, the vice chancellors of public and private universities across the country gathered in one place and deliberated on the role of universities in the promotion of peace and made important suggestions to advance the agenda of peace.

Reorganization and Strengthening of Student Societies

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

and Distribution of Narratives

To make the young students active at the university level, we need to strengthen the student societies at the universities. Where these societies exist, they need to be strengthened and activated, and where they do not exist, their formation must be given priority. Students should also be given an opportunity in these societies, and they should be brought forward as leaders so that they can also get a chance to prove themselves as leaders. Because the students' societies model at the level of universities is the cause of organizing the youth and promoting extra-curricular activities among them, on the other hand, these activities also create social importance among the students. Similarly, these societies also help in developing the new generation as leaders.

To combat extremism, when these societies are organized based on literature, poetry, drama, music, and theatre, it will help to eradicate the extremist trend. The culture of dialogue will flourish among the people and the new generation will be in a position to play their role positively with the help of healthy activities. Students associated with societies need full encouragement from their leadership at the university level and all their activities must not be tied to credit hours. The training of these societies should be properly managed and they should be convinced of what kind of activities they should promote with the help of these existing societies and they should be told that their new as well as existing societies will play a role in ending the extremism.

Abid

There should also be collaboration between societies and civil society organizations, and in particular art, culture, and theatre-based programs should be developed to help reduce extremism. There should also be a poster exhibition on peace and tolerance where the youth can promote the narrative with the help of their art that we should take peace as the foundation and advance the process of development. Similarly, sports should be made a base at the level of both boys and girls because the promotion of sports encourages people towards healthy activities. To promote the culture of dialogue, regular seminars, papers, and discussions should be promoted where the experts on various issues and the students themselves should be given a free opportunity to discuss and present their case and their opinions should be respected. There should be resources for all these societies at the university level and a budget should be allocated so that all these societies can continue their work based on maximum extracurricular activities and their full encouragement should be done at the university level.

Ensuring Digital Literacy Including Cyber Policy, Cyber Crime and Cyber Security

To combat extremism, we have to generalize digital literacy education in the new generation, especially in cyber policy, cybercrime, and cyber security, in all subjects irrespective of the fields. It is possible to prevent what we see in the context of negative trends or hateful content on social media and to highlight the intellectual and educational awareness among people, including

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

political and social, that they can use social media in positive aspects. And if you want to criticize, then take a critical approach by understanding the aspect of criticism. Preventing the policy of using this social media as a weapon for any activities and informing people about the policy, legislation, and necessary steps in this regard so that the new generation can also be aware to refrain from doing things that unnecessarily create politics of hatred in the country. We have to raise awareness of how dialogue is conducted and how to respect the opinions of others so that intellectual confusion does not arise. Because still, our new generation does not have any kind of awareness about the policies, legislations, and punishments in this context that have to be ensured. Similarly, when we say that the new generation runs negative campaigns and promotes extremist tendencies for no reason, then one remedy is an alternative narrative, i.e. social media with positive aspects to answer these negative questions.

Concerning cyber security, digital literacy is also about the specifics of cyber hygienics and security processes (Koltay, 2011). But such aspects, points, and materials should be highlighted which can play a key role in eliminating extremist tendencies. Instead of negative reactions, when we try to create a culture of social media or peace, tolerance, respect, and dialogue, then we can see more positive aspects. A new generation of people can create new debates about extremism, create vlogs, make videos, and create short documentaries, posters, and songs to present an alternative peaceful narrative. The strategy

Abid

of merely presenting social media negatively is not correct, but we should take advantage of it and present our point of view more effectively.

Promotes Civic Education

In our education system, we need basic civil rights including basic democracy, sociology, conflicts, communication, psychology, constitution and law, various civil laws, the interrelation between state and citizens, and rights of minorities and transgenders including women and children. Basic education should be inculcated in the next generation so that they form the society and should play their part in it. In particular, respect for the opinions of people with different points of view, a peaceful approach to protest politics, promotion of dialogue, avoidance of confrontational aspects, the habit of carrying people along, and respect for each other's basic rights. Abiding, respecting the law, accepting the writ of the state, educating the voters, awakening the political and social consciousness, avoiding the politics of vandalism, and educating about class discrimination to develop positive attitudes towards each other among boys and girls. And in the new generation, the thought also emerged that they have developed their development as well as the development of the country.

Promote Career Counselling Centres and Conflict Resolution

Another problem is that we should create career counseling Centres at the university level to guide the new generation and eliminate the problems or controversies

Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

related to them so that they can inform the generation of experts in different fields about what they should do and help them choose what suits them best. Even if the generation is not guided, it shows them towards chaos including negative activities, or leads them towards negative activities including addiction. It is these small disputes that become the backbone of them and these actions become part of the big battles, so the generation should be guided in such a way that there is a possibility of improvement in the professional life and in developing the ability to deal with the conflicts they face. Many students in Pakistan lack awareness about various career options and the educational pathways required to pursue them. Career counseling center can provide the necessary guidance, helping students make informed decisions (Ali, 2014).

By aligning students' skills with market demands, career counseling can help reduce the mismatch between education and employment, thereby addressing the high unemployment rate among educated youth (Aslam, 2013). These Centres can identify skill gaps and recommend appropriate training programs, thus enhancing employability and professional growth. Similarly, a basic idea can be highlighted with the help of these Centres that we should have a dialogue between teachers, students, and people who are important in decision-making related to the governance of universities and there should not be any gap in it so that all Be able to speak in a free environment.

CONCLUSION

This column is aimed at eradicating extremism at the level of educational institutions and among the new generation. Whether it is extremism or terrorism, it cannot be dealt with in political isolation, but it is the responsibility of all parties to play a responsible role at their level so that we can find a cure for this extremism. An important center to ensure the search for this remedy is the importance of academic institutions and these centres of learning can lead to keeping the next generation away from extremism and terrorism.

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Extremism and Social Critical Integration & Role of Universities

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