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**RESTORING PEACE AND ADOPTING RESILIENT STRATEGIES
FOR CULTURAL TOLERANCE: PAKISTAN'S EFFORTS IN
COUNTERING VIOLENT RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM (CVRE) IN
PAKISTAN**

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Abstract:

The objective of the current study is to find out the factors of peace building and countering violent extremism in Pakistan. In the modern day world violent religious extremism is very much prevalent and the issue is even worse in Pakistan where numerous religious and ethnic minorities are present. For this purpose qualitative inquiry followed by secondary data analysis technique has been adopted by the researcher. For this purpose significant empirical literature from research journal, reports and books were analyzed. The findings of the study illustrate the collective national identity along with social process and cultural rejuvenation are vital in restoring the peace and countering violent religious extremism. In addition to that the role of media and social institutions is very handy owing to their wide range approach and scope.

Introduction:

Since the inception, Pakistan has been suffering a number of multifold issues directly and indirectly. Pakistan emerged as a security state in South Asia while countering mainly with India which led to the spirit of Jihad among the Muslims of this region. The diversified issues of Pakistan mainly include ethnic, religious and sectarian that resulted violence in Pakistan. The wave of this ethnic and religious extremism further enlarged with the Soviet's invasion

in Afghanistan which aided the organization of these different extremist sects in this region (Khan, 2015).

The soviet's invasion attracted the attention of the United States to control the communist wave in South Asia and in this regard US sought the help of Pakistan, Afghanistan and other Muslim countries to counter this invasion. The ethno-religious and violent tribal people were gathered and trained to fight against the communism in Afghanistan which led to the systematic gathering of the scattered groups (Khan, 2015).

Later, these tribal fighters were not rehabilitated after the withdrawal of communist forces from South Asia. They further organized themselves and wished to achieve their objectives. Furthermore, the 9/11 attacks and war on terror created more critical situation for the terrorists in Afghanistan and the tribal people in Pakistan. Pakistan suffered a lot due to the violent and religious extremism despite countering it. Since the incident of 9/11, Pakistan lost almost 80,000 valuable citizens and the economy is also badly affected. The terrorist's wave seriously damaged the cultural and religious ethos of Pakistan (Express Tribune, March 29, 2015).

Despite establishing the awareness among the masses about the promoter of extremist activities in Pakistan, there is still a proportion of the civil society who supports these people. The reason behind this situation is the strong particular sectarian and religious approach that motivates them to support these actors of terrorism. These people are mostly uneducated and have limited logical reasoning. They unknowingly support the extremist agenda (Mirahmadi et al, 2015).

Despite the religious reason, there are also other domestic causes of violent religious extremism in Pakistan. The weak governance system is might be the major cause of extremism in Pakistan. The social injustices, the intellectually stagnant madrassah system are also some factors of aid in violent religious extremism in Pakistan. The students of these madrassah follow a particular thought during the course of the educational activities and they react in the same way (Zaidi, 2013).

The violent and religious extremism in Pakistan does not have a single motive or reason rather it is a multi-layered phenomenon. It may take different forms i.e. in the form of sectarianism, Islamization movement or any other jihadist movement (Porges & Stern, 2010). Along with the domestic causes of extremism in Pakistan, there are also global reasons behind the violent and religious extremism in Pakistan. The main global root cause of extremism in Pakistan is the strong contradiction with the point of view of United State. The history also reveals that United State was the main contributor in establishing these religious violent groups and they think that they were used by United State. Later they organized themselves under different identities and prepared insurgencies against United State. Furthermore the western supported insurgencies in Baluchistan (Express Tribune, July 2, 2014).

Violent Religious Extremism in Pakistan:

The term extremism basically means to support the ideas of a particular school of thought. The extremists give importance to their ideas and have little spirit of compromise and they perform extreme actions on the basis of their likings. The transformation of these dogmas and beliefs into actions leads to extremism in the society which causes the harm at large level. Their actions create a streak of fear and terror in the society which they consider their success (Khalid, 2014).

The roots of the religious triggers of extremism in Pakistan go back to the early years of country. In the initial years, the religious Ulema opted the rigid attitude about the constitution making. There were also some people who were not in the favor of positions for the minorities but it was the vision of Jinnah to provide the equal rights to all segments of the society in the light of Islam. The religious education, economic inequalities and sectarianism are the major triggers of violent extremism in Pakistan. The fundamentalists further fueled the wave of violent religious extremism in the country (Ghumro et al, 2008).

The violent religious extremism is especially born during the regime of Zia-ul-Haq. Commonly, it is perceived that madrassahs are the main source of religious violent extremism in Pakistan. These religious educational institutions belong to particular school of thought who adopts a fundamentalist and rigid policy towards the others. There are also some studies which show that these madrassahs are funded by the international actors who give them funding and get their violent tasks completed (Khalid, 2014).

The religious conflicts have been rising since the inception of Pakistan resulted in violence in the country. Since its inception, there are divergent religious schools of thought which usually contradict to each other. This competition between them created the environment of misfits. Sectarianism further created the disturbed situation which is also funded by the international actors who fuel them to get their objectives. Pakistan has been facing ups and downs regarding the violent religious extremism as it was at its peak during the Soviet's invasion in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the war on terror once again pumped it in Pakistan which devastated the social and economic situation in Pakistan (Khan, 2017).

Motives behind Violent Extremism in Pakistan:

The issue of extremism is not associated with a particular country or region rather it has encompassed the globe. The motives and factors behind this violent extremism vary from area to area. With the varying nature of factors the intensity of violent activities are differ. The violent religious extremism is the fatalist type as it causes more damages and casualties. The individuals are brain washed and they are trained in such hated perspective that they even alter themselves for their motives (Denoeux & Carter, 2009).

Another factor of extremism is the frustrations with political scenario at local and global level. The main exporters of violent religious extremism do not like the political environment at both levels because their objectives are not being fulfilled. They want to impose their ideologies on others and in absence of doing so they use the violent activities. At the global level they are against the western agenda to disintegrate the Muslims communities across the globe (Khan, 2015).

There are many studies which reveal that unjust distribution of economic resources and the lack of education are basic drivers of violent extremism. The religious violent extremism further involves other reasons as well i.e. enforcement of their self-prepared Islamic laws because in original Islam, the killing of one human being is considered the killing of entire humanity. Hence, they want to perpetuate their own Islam on the others while employing any motive even religious terrorism (Tankersley, 2015).

The concentration of the wealth among a few hands may also be considered a reason which supports the terrorist activities in Pakistan. The poor are getting poor and rich are getting more economic resources which alienate the poor people from the larger segments of society. On the other hand, the western led war in the Middle East is also a factor of religious extremism in the Muslim countries. This western invasion inspired the Muslims especially

the religious communities to instigate wars against the western propaganda which the west perceives as religious extremism (Tankersley, 2015).

Besides the global factors of extremism, there are also many other domestic reasons to prevail religious violent extremism in Pakistan. The foremost factor of religious violent extremism in Pakistan is sectarianism which was born during Zia-ul-Haq era. The wave of Islamization flourished during the regime of military dictator Zia-ul-Haq which provided more opportunities to the religious actors in Pakistan. This wave further inclined to religious extremism in Pakistan which was basically organized during the reign of Zia-ul-Haq (Sial & Anjum, 2010).

Countering Violent Extremism:

Countering the violent extremism has become an important concern of the policy makers since the advent of 21st century. The widespread impacts of extremism attracted the attention of national and international stakeholders to adopt possible measures to halt this phenomenon. It involves different measures especially to counter the recruitment of the young terrorists because they become easy victim of these terrorist organizations (Holmer, 2013).

The people who are involved or have chance to get involved in the extremist activities may possibly be rehabilitated with education and soft attitudes of the society. The studies have shown that the lack of awareness and education is the root cause of violent extremism and it can be stopped only with soft measures i.e. education, culture and other means. Winning the hearts of people will surely forbid them to become the targets of terrorist organizations (Rana, 2015).

The violent and religious extremism has many factors across the globe. In Pakistan especially, the intolerant behavior of the domestic and global stakeholders gave rise to this phenomenon which resulted the devastation of the society. It can be cured with the tolerant behavior and soft policies. The cultural measures are so fruitful in this regard as Pakistani culture is very soft which gives importance to every segment of society. The wave of violent extremism is tackled with both soft and hard measures in Pakistan i.e. the military operations against the extremist organizations and though cultural songs, motivational speeches of the folk and well known religious personalities (Khan, 2011). In the result of attack on Army Public School, the poems were sung which urge to educate the children of the militants.

Basit (2015) presented few suggestions concerning the countering of violent extremism. These suggestions may be fruitful in order to get rid of the religious violent extremism in Pakistan as well. These countering suggestions are following.

- First of all, denying the physical access to terrorists is the foremost strategy to counter the wave of violent extremism. The terrorists should not be given the opportunity to interact with community so that they may not inculcate their ideas in the minds of the innocent people.
- Secondly, the recruiting system ought to be targeted so that that cannot recruit the new members. They recruit mostly the poor and uneducated members from the backward areas. It will reduce their strength and force them to prosper further.
- Thirdly, the rehabilitation plans must be introduced to educate the civil society and to create awareness among the people. In doing so, the civil society will not be easy target of the terrorists organizations. It will help to counter the violent religious extremism in Pakistan.

- Fourthly, dialogues should be initiated with the stakeholders of terrorism so that the root cause of their violent activities may be found. It provides an opportunity to correct them and their possible demands should be accepted.
- Lastly, the people who want to live a normal life should be provided better opportunities by the government. The counseling plans can help to rehabilitate them in the society and they should be given permission to live a normal life.

In the light of the above commentary, it is concluded that the violent and religious extremism can be tackled through the soft measures. The coercive measures are also used to control the violent activities but there are chances that these coercive measures give birth to other problems. Sometimes, the use of hard force increases the intensity of terrorism. The education, recreational, counseling and cultural programs are very fruitful to change the minds of the people who may be involved in the terrorist activities. These soft measures create a spirit to live their life in a normal way. It tackles their wish to destroy their lives because the terrorist literature has brain washed them and they are ready to quit their lives in so called religious way.

Peace-Building and Resilience:

It is very difficult to differentiate between resilience and peace-building because both of the terms almost have similar meanings. Both of these concepts strive to bring positive changes in the society. The basic objective of resilience and peace building is to transform the people from negative to post and from conflict to peace. In some of the studies, both concepts are treated in the same way but there is difference between these two concepts (Harris, 2013). The concept of peace building is associated with every possible aid and intervention which is carried out before a conflict occurs. Hence, it basically means that the peace building is a process in which precautions and preventive measures are opted to control any possible conflict in future. At this stage, the causes of possible future conflicts are deeply studied to control them. It also enlists the causes of conflict if it occurs so that it may be controlled as soon as possible.

In this regard, the process of peace-building has much importance for the policy makers and the stakeholders who involve in maintaining peace in society. This process helps to keep the society on the track of peaceful environment. In the process of peace building, the priorities are set by the donors and policy makers to control the future conflict.

Resilience on the other hand is slightly different from peace building. It is linked with the reformation in the society. It also brings positive changes in the society and adopts reformative measures like that of peace building. Resilience basically involves the ability from short-term or long-term disturbances in the wider environment (Menkhaus, 2013). This definition of resilience shows that it works after a conflict or negative change occurred in a society. Resilience works in a reformative way where the individuals are reformed and rehabilitated in a socially accepted wider environment.

In the current research, both peace-building and resilience have much importance. These both concepts are also very helpful in maintaining peace and introducing reforms for the religious violent extremists. The young people are mostly recruited by the agencies which export terrorism. These young people are not aware about the consequences and reasons of extremism because they are religiously blackmailed by these organizations. In such scenario, the programs of peace-building and resilience are very helpful to reform the victims and to make them aware about the extremist activities.

Objective:

The current study is based on single objective i.e.

- To find out the factors of peace building and countering violent religious extremism.

Significance of the study:

Violent religious extremism is creating havoc with the social fabric of the society and also hampering the progress of the society by limiting the choices and raising conflict in the society. In such circumstances it is very important to identify the factors that can improve the current situation and increase the religious harmony by countering the violent religious extremism. So, the findings of the current study would yield better insight into the problem and will outline possible remedies.

So, without any doubt the current study is very important in solving the social issue and promoting peace in the society. The outlined factors in the current study would help not only policy maker but also the stakeholders of the society in countering violent religious extremism in Pakistan by keeping in line the cultural context of the country.

Methodology:

The current study is based on qualitative research inquiry to understand the phenomenon of countering the violent religious extremism in the cultural context of the Pakistan. The qualitative inquiry is best suited method for such kind of inquiries and researches where the basic theme of the study pertains to finding out the in-depth understanding of the topic which is in line with current study where researcher tries to find out the factors responsible for countering violent religious extremism in Pakistan (Neuman, 2000).

In addition to the qualitative type of inquiry the researcher in the current study adopted descriptive research design to find out the factors of the peace building and countering religious extremism. The idea behind using descriptive research design is that the current study doesn't focus on finding out any relationship between the variables and tries to see the relationship with the help of the statistical operations (Teddle & Ashworth, 2009). Hence, in line with the idea of the study descriptive research design is adopted which directed the researcher to describe the factors of peace building and countering violent religious extremism.

Most importantly, the current study is based on secondary data analysis and uses existing literature to see the phenomenon. In this type of data analysis the researcher thoroughly observes the research material and finds the relevant themes that meet the need of the study by fitting into indigenous context (Vartanian, 2010). In this kind of analysis techniques the role of important and significant literature is very important as the final outcome of the study depends on the available literature (Yerger, 2014). For this purpose the researcher extensively reviewed peer reviewed articles along with international reports. The researcher also looked for the books relevant to the subject matter of the study.

Analysis and findings of the study:

This section of the study pertains to the findings of the study. As the study is based on the secondary data, hence this section is divided into different themes relating to the peace building and how to counter violent religious extremism. Different themes are narrated with the help of existing literature and some observations regarding the current trend and cultural context of the Pakistan are also added.

Building National identity:

One of the most important tools for cultural rejuvenation and to promote peace in society is bringing national identity. Nationalism is an important area to combat violence and promote peace in the country (Barnett and Rosen, 2007). In the course of the current study, it has been found to the literature and keeping in view the cultural context of Pakistan is not difficult to infer that Pakistan is suffering from a lack of national identity. There is it needs to promote National identity so that the peace building process can be initiated. Language important tool to increase National identity therefore in most the European countries national identity is rooted in the common. Tamil language xx groups and groups are present in the majority they can be a helpful tool to raise and increase National identity (Fairclough, 2001).

Most of the European countries and first world countries have developed their way towards the progress by creating a common language and peace building process through National identity. Globalization challenges and somewhat works against the true spirit of nationalism and advocates geographical boundaries and that too in a very limited framework which restricts the true spirit of nationalism, globalization tries to make it possible to experience different cultures at one place that hinders nationalism (Hymes, 2003).

Countering violent religious extremism can be obtained by promoting National identities (Sharman, 2010). Therefore keeping in view the current situation of Pakistan is not difficult to see that countering violent religious extremism can be obtained by promoting National identity in Pakistan as there are different regional and ethnic identities prevailing in Pakistan for progressive and peaceful society. The above evidences and literature review clearly indicates that in an order to counter religious extremism the role of building national identity is very important. And this case is very much true in the context of Pakistan as national identity is less visible as compared to other identities such as regional and ethnic identities.

Social Institutions and Countering Violent Religious Extremism:

The importance of the social institutions cannot be neglected in an order to streamline the society. And similarly, social institutions can help in peace building process and countering religious extremism (Boege, 2004). The role of traditional social institutions is very productive and helpful in remedy of where society is more delicate and lack cohesiveness. The role of social institution is mostly non-state centric, hence the local community is more inclined towards the approach of the institutions (Baker, 2009).

Countering religious extremism require constituting laws and implementation of those laws. However, society's will to abide by the law depends on the nature of the community and it has been observed the locally initiated laws are more relevant and people abide by them more frequently than laws enacted by the state. So, this increases the importance and role of the social institutions in countering religious extremism and peace building process (Faure, 2000; Baker, 2009). Peace building process and countering religious extremism require psycho-social healing and also focuses on the restoring local community interest and trust. Hence, in such circumstances the role of social institutions further deepens. This has also been widely observed in the African and Asian countries as such approaches have brought positive results in conflict management especially by the point of religion (Mohammad, 2010).

Social Practices and Peace Building to Counter Religious Extremism:

Aristotle phrase "man is a social animal" is enough shed light on the importance of social life in human beings. Through increased social interaction, one can understand the needs of the other person and psychological get attach to other which decreases the likelihood of the conflict and improves the peace building process (Baired, 2011). Social practices are

normative activities of communities and groups which structure their lives and provide them with a sense of order as well as give them an identity as a community or group. Such process help in countering religious extremism. Wide range of social practices such as events, rituals and festivals reinforce the group solidarity and when such activities are conducted by involving groups and communities of varying backgrounds, its fruits are more valuable (McCandless, 2012).

Such social practices require vibrant approach as the process of social change also effects such social practices. Therefore, it is the need of the hour to gauge the current need of the society and how to handle such issues in an order counter religious extremism. People from varying religious backgrounds must come under one larger umbrella so that their differences are minimized and empirical evidences have shown that such strategies are very valuable and important (Steward, 2010).

This aspect is very important in the context of the Pakistan where there is lack of social practices and social mingling among people of different socio-economic and religious backgrounds. In the Pakistani context it is very important on the state and community level that more interaction and events are organized that promote social cohesion in an order to promote peace and counter religious extremism.

Cultural Rejuvenation to Counter Extremism:

The youth is the most important asset of every nation as the youth of the day has to run the country in future. Unfortunately, the youth has become the victim of the extremism in the recent era in Pakistan. The only trick to rehabilitate these young individuals is through the educational and cultural reforms. The culture of Pakistan is rich and soft which motivates the people to live their lives with charm. The rehabilitation programs started in Swat to educate and de-radicalize them into the normal social life (Abbas, 2013).

The rehabilitation programs provided the opportunities to militant detainees to reform them. It will provide a chance so that they may prove themselves as normal citizens of Pakistan. These programs also provide them recreational facilities which will help them to enjoy their lives (Scharm, 2014).

The reformation in madrassah education system is another way to counter violent religious extremism in Pakistan. These madrassahs are formed according to a particular framework where there are limited chances of flexibility. The reformation of madrassah into excellence centers will also include the cultural rejuvenation to provide cultural and recreational facilities. The students of madrassah education will be aligned with the larger culture of society. It will decrease the chances to indulge them into extremism (Gishkori, 2015).

The civil society has also a critical positioning in countering violent religious extremism in Pakistan. No reformative and cultural plan can be successful without the support of civil society. The civil society points out the easy targets and activities of extremists in their localities that are helpful to counter violent extremism in Pakistan (Mirahmadi et al, 2012). There are almost 100 civil society organizations already working to counter violent religious extremism in Pakistan. The importance of these civil society organizations cannot be ignored while adopting the plan of cultural rejuvenation. These organizations are the best source to introduce cultural reforms among the population suffering from extremism (Mirahmadi et al, 2012).

Media and Countering Religious Extremism:

Role of media has often been associated with negativity and propaganda and very little empirical literature is available regarding the role of media in positivity specially countering religious extremism and peace building (Wolfsfeld, 2004). The role of media is of prime

importance in spreading information to wide range of people and with maximum impact. The occurrence violent activity is not an abrupt activity rather an long history revolves around it therefore, media can play a vital role in the identification of such factors and mechanisms that are about to initiate violent activities. Peace journalists are also very important in identifying the religious factors that can hamper the essence of peace in the society (Westphal, 2004).

In the wake of the modern day social media influence the process of peace building has become more important but important is to check the contents of the media and what has been spreading through social media. Social media and other media tools allow people to share their opinion and knowledge hence if this is done in positive and constructive way the process of peace building can become easy and important (Dominick, 2012). One basic notion here is that culture is a learned and repetitive behaviour, which is imbibed through regular exposure to others lifestyles and shared with others who also adopt the same values. This notion of culture can be narrowed down to popular culture or pop culture, as all socially acquired traditions and lifestyles learned and made popular through the media. Components of popular culture considered in this work are: linguistic styles and slangs (Baran, 2009).

This factor and role of media and social media is very much true in the context of Pakistan where unchecked media has become a core of the problem and exaggerated the hate speeches and violent religious extremism.

Discussion:

Pakistan is a country with wide range of religious and ethnic minorities which make it more vulnerable to the violent religious extremism. The extremists may take different forms in which the state extremists are more critical who perform their extremist activities at larger level. They create a sense of panic and violence at state level and shape their recognition as an extremist group (Baqai, 2011).

The extremists do not run their ideas in vacuums rather they instigate them in the minds of their obedient followers. Their ideas flourished in the minds of other since the last decades. These ideas are being prospered with the help of religious actors and the political conspiracies which are mainly driven in the wave on anti-west policy. The anti-west thought is the basic driver that works in better way for the religious violent extremists (Husain, 2013).

Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) is mainly a soft approach to handle the wave of terrorism. This strategy ranges from micro to macro levels which involve the plans of rehabilitation and educating the people. The educating and providing the awareness to people is the motive of CVE in the developing and developed countries (Rana, 2015). The estimation of the reasons of conflicts accelerates the different stakeholders to adopt every possible measure to control the conflict. The different agencies get involved in the process of peace building in order to maintain the smooth functioning of the society. The funding is made to invest for the preventive measures of the conflicts in which the local and external aid agencies participate (Harris, 2013).

There are multiple ways to counter violent religious extremism keeping in mind the cultural sensitivity of that particular society. Numerous ways and mechanism have been identified to counter violent extremism (Masood, 2010). The most important way to counter religious extremism is making the people lay under one umbrella to make a collective identity. This has been very true in the perspective and context of Pakistan where national identity is very much the need of hour as mostly people attach themselves to the regional and ethnic identities. On the same token the need to rejuvenate the traditional cultural is very much required. Most of the empirical researchers have focused on redefining and attaching

emotions to the traditional cultures is very important. This stance again looks very much important in the context of Pakistan where we are more inclined towards western ideologies and aspire other cultural traits. Hence, it is important in the context of Pakistan to rejuvenate Pakistani culture (Khan, 2013).

In the end existing literature has shown that the role of media is very important. The Pakistani media must take up the responsibility to counter the violent religious extremism (Porges & Stern, 2010). The findings of the current study are very much in line with the existing literature regarding countering violent religious extremism.

Conclusion:

On the basis of the findings of the current study and generated themes from the secondary data analysis it is not difficult to conclude that Pakistan is at the high point of this social issue where violent religious extremism is prevalent. However, it is important to promote national identity and measures must be taken to restrict the regional identities.

In the same manner traditional social institutions are also very important in managing and countering violent religious extremism. Institutions such as family and politics are very significant in peace building and countering religious extremists. On the same token social practices such as events, rituals and festivals must be frequently celebrated by gathering and merging communities and religious stakeholders. The role of cultural rejuvenation is also very important in countering religious extremism. In the end media, the most powerful social institutions and tool in the modern age must come up with the most relevant solution to the problem by spreading positivity in the society and promptly identifying the violent factors in the society. Media information dissemination must be ethical and responsible towards countering religious extremism.

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