

# Extremism In Pakistan And Its Impact On Educational Institutes

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## Abstract

*This study presents empirical information regarding the root causes and ramifications of extremism at campus level, which is one of the sensitive issues to the security and Higher Education of Pakistan. Different events and aftermath of 9/11 brought with it the issue of extremism not only on social and political grounds but also in education institutions. This extremism is practiced by many actors due to motivation of their own ideologies, ethnic, political and religious aims in higher education institutions of Pakistan. The researcher has investigated the main driving motive of the issue in educational institutes. The higher education institutions in Pakistan had suffered from the extremism due to its geographical location and the violent nature of the people. Some analysts are of the view that the intense emotional attachment of people towards religion had also been a key reason for many cases and incidents, happened in institutes, in the context of extremism. This study is qualitative in nature, thematic analyses is used for analyzing different data.*

**Keywords:** Extremism, Pakistan, Higher education institutions, Terrorism, Violence.

## Introduction

Extremism is the beliefs, actions and motivations of the people who support and use violence to further radical ideological, religious, political and ethnic aims. Some argue that extremists are the people whose ideas are more distant than the mainstream of society. All sorts of conflicts can be resolved by an agreement between both the parties, just like a fight ends on a handshake and a war ends on a treaty. In contrast, extremists always believe that the other group must be destroyed, influenced, controlled and demolished because its innate nature and presence is unfriendly to the success of extremists' own group. (Berger 2019).

Extremism is the state of mind in which one tries his/her best to convince the other of his opinion and idea and preach for that purpose. The phenomena of extremism have a linkage with human insecurity. The rise of extremism and radicalization can lead to human insecurity

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and vice versa. (Rizvi, 2015). According to Global Terrorism database, the violent extremism has killed more than 43,412 people in 2014, increased from 22,211 in 2013 and 3,329 in 2012. The main targets of violent extremism were the five countries: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Nigeria, with many negative impacts on their societies, developmental work, economy, tourism, security, peace and education. (Silva, 2015).

There are various reasons and factors for violent extremism and radicalization: Ideological, economic, social, political, Psychological and technological factors. All of them are parts of extremism puzzle. Technology is more like an ‘enabler’ than a cause of extremism because the terrorist organizations are extremely successful in recruiting new members and attempting suicide bombings through social media. (Hafez and Mulin, 2015). Economic disparity can facilitate radicalization if combined with personnel experience of discrimination. Higher level of isolation and discriminations of all kinds can be a reason of criminality. (Hafez and Mullins, 2015).

A study on 172 countries found a strong link between social and economic discriminations against the minorities and the increased risk of Extremism, violence and terrorism. (Piazza, 2011).

### **Extremism in Pakistan**

Extremism is defined as the hostility toward the religion and sect of other people, their traditions, valued and customs, and the rejection of rights of minorities and women and the struggle to change them through violence and act of terrorism. Women are one of the largest groups in Pakistan which are victims of extremist’s violence. (Rehman, 2019). Intolerance has a strong hold on society and the space for free and open dialogues has decreased even in the debates of intellectuals too. The religious forces are not the only reason, but political elite and establishment are also the shareholders in the issue of extremism and radicalization because the extremists groups try to promote their agenda through political means. In Pakistan, the driving factor of extremism is politico-ideological and the socio-psychological factors facilitate it. The undemocratic political culture is the reason behind the extremism in Pakistan, although constitutionally and legally all citizens are given equal political opportunities. (Rana, 2012).

The Soviet Invasion in Afghanistan caused serious internal and external implications to the security and economy of Pakistan. The Afghan war had made huge influx of Refugees into Pakistan who had not only caused political, economic, social, environmental and ecological problems but also possesses serious security issues to Pakistan. They were the reason behind drug trafficking, Kalashnikov culture, sectarianism, and endless law and order issues and also corrupting Pakistani elites. (Hilali, 2002).

The involvement of Pakistan and supporting jihad in Afghanistan had caused severe internal and external contradictions in Pakistan including the sectarian conflicts among Shia-Sunni and Deobandi-Wahabi Clashes. These sectarian groups with their opponents had killed many people in their rival groups and carry a strong support from external sympathizers. The extremist activities carried out by these groups shows that the decision of supporting these groups in the past has become a crisis for Pakistan. The connection of extremist groups Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen with external terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan of TahirYuldasher Chechen Guerilla War has led to several bloody clashes in Pakistan. (Shaikh, 2011).

An armed branch of shia militant organization was formed in 1980s, named Sipah-e-Muhammadi, to fight against the Sunni organization, Sipah-e-Sahaba. According to the survey report of The News Newspaper, the worst year of 1994 had marked killing of 118 Shias and 77 Sunnis in sectarian violence. It is important to consider that Shia Militancy in Pakistan arose with the official policy of Islamization which was definitely an anti-shia policy. Since then Shias are fighting in defense of their minority and that had caused some very serious conflicts among Shias and Sunnis radicals, the battlefield was mostly the mosques of both the sects. (Roy, 2002).

The violent extremism in the context of sectarianism raised for the first time due to the Islamization policy of Zia-ul-Haq in 1980s. The Revolution in Iran 1979, the Jihadism by United States in Afghanistan and American Invasion in 2001 is the cause of sectarianism in neighbor states. The state have control of the some of the militant organizations that flourish in Pakistan and some turned violent against it (Jan, 2022 ). Pakistan had been using these religious groups for their own purposes for a period of time and that's the reason behind this dilemma. The state had promoted the sectarian group in the context of their own hate agendas. The policy attitude has increased the tolerance of all institutions for these religious and sectarian groups whether is a political party or security institutions. As compared to other Muslim countries, ranging from Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Central Asia to Turkey, Pakistan show a higher tolerance for these groups. These countries do not let the religious group to hold the state narrative or policy narratives but provide them for scholarships instead of promoting them. (Rana, 2018).

In the present time, one of the qualified and active militant organizations inspired with Al-Qaeda was involved in killing Retired Colonel in Baloch Area and targeting leader of opposition in Sindh Assembly Khwaja Izharul Hassan. They were operating under the Al-Qaeda leadership Ayman-ul-Zawahiri and their strength varies from five to ten individuals. (Dawn, 2017).

The incident of attack on the bus that belonged to the Ismaili Shia Muslims in Karachi marked another example of sectarian extremism in Pakistan. More than 43 were dead in the attack. It was the fifth attack on Shia community in 2015. (Hashim, 2015).

The suicide attack on the Christian community in 2016 in Lahore on the day of Easter was another setback for the public, government and military of Pakistan who had been struggling since very long against the extremism and terrorism. The attack was planned to be carried out on the Christians celebrating Easter but most of the people died were Muslims. Pakistan was a hotbed for the Islamist Extremists. (Curtis, 2016).

The extremist violence against women is one of the main consequences of extreme intolerance in society of Pakistan. A survey conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in collaboration with Bureau of Statistics and the Punjab Commission on the status of Women had given a report that one-third of the women in Punjab, aged 15-64, have suffered violence. The types of violence against women is the acid attacks, burning women, killing for honor, killed for failing to give the dowry demands, harassment at workplace and so on. (Rehman, 2019).

One of the example of increasing culture of intolerance and extremism is the misuse of Blasphemy law in Pakistan. And the Pakistani political leadership is incapable to pass any law or amend the harsh laws due to the pressure and fear of extremist groups. The case of assassination of Governor Punjab Salman Taseer by his guard, in the case of Aasia Bibi who

is in jail since 2009 under the trail of Blasphemous act, shows the failure of Justice System of Pakistan. (Curtis, 2016).

The culture of violence against the children outside school in the form of physical and sexual abuse is the extremist face of society. The abuse against the home servants has increased in the past few years. State has failed to complete finish the tradition of punishments in schools. Enforced disappearance is one of the ugliest types of extremism. (Rehman, 2019).

The Religiously inspired violent extremism is bigger than the idea we have in our mind. The Hindu Temples were vandalized and private property was destroyed in Gotki, Sindh in September, 2019. Keeping in view the incident of Gotki, the group of people using faith and religion for their political influence must be controlled and checked under the law. The state should show zero tolerance towards the hate narratives spread through lectures and online media by the extremist. (Rana, 2019). In Pakistan, the problem lies in structural setup of politics and oppression and that how extremists are trained and made to adopt a violent outlook for their aims. The state must start with changing state behavior in the prevention of Violent Extremism. Not only the vote making political statement would work but sustained efforts are need to safeguard the coming generations of Pakistan. This state is often not willing to grapple with the internal root causes of extremism which basically lies in the policies of the state. In most of the cases, it has been proven that authorities and political body legitimize the idea of violence and extremism and work to propagate it through common masses and their own people. (Jawaid, 2018).

### **Extremism in Higher Education Institutes of Pakistan:**

Violence and extremism in higher education Institutes of Pakistan is not a new phenomenon. This trend has a history of decades but now is out of control and tolerance. This violent attitude was installed in students for the first time in University of Karachi through deliberate planning by the religious leaders. Once cricket bats and hockey sticks were a part of the game but now they are used to beat the student of the rival group. The ‘‘Thunder Squad’’ was a group of powerful strong men for the purpose of violence and it was introduced by the Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (IJT) in early 1970s to thrash opponent students and show their power by violence. The IJT is the student wing of the religious cum political party Jamat-e-Islami. The thunder squad reappeared in campus with the aim to cleanse the Universities from all the immoral activities and for that purpose they intended toward the use of violence. With the period of time, the National Student Federation (NSF) and Democratic Students Federation (DSF) emerged in the University of Karachi and the bats and hockey stick were replaced with guns, knives and pistols. The members of other organization got access to the weapons because they were backed by the political parties. (Baloch and Musyani, 2018).

In 1970s, Bhutto knew the tactics to use students for Machiavellian politics and for that purposes he established Peoples Students Federation (PSF) which was operated by Pakistan’s People Party. Wasat Ullah Khan, a renowned columnist wrote that Bhutto was helped by NSF, a leftist wing organization in election but once he ascended the throne, he kept them on side and made his own students political organization. (Baloch and Musyani, 2018).

The killing of a student Hafiz Aslam in University of Karachi in 1981 marked the beginning of Kalashnikov Culture in UOK, Pakistan. The armed conflict among the PSF and All Pakistan Muhajir Students Organization (APMSO) in 1989 was the last conflict in University of Karachi. After that conflict, the rangers, a paramilitary force, were deployed in the campus for a very short time but even after three decades, the rangers are still stationed there due to the violent activities of students.(Baloch and Musyani, 2018).

An example of extremism among students is Naureen Leghari, a student of Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences was caught from Lahore with a group of Daesh. She was trained there and all set to attack the Christian community. Naureen said she was approached by the terrorists through social media. And she blamed social media for her being radicalized. (Ahmed, 2017).

Saad Aziz, a graduate of IBA, Karachi, one of the top-notch private institutions of Pakistan, was found involved in attack on Ismaili Bus in Karachi, killing 43 Shia Muslims. It is not only the uneducated and poor people but the educated and professional people are attracted by the extremist groups. (Baloch and Musyani, 2018).

Another conflict in campus happened in Punjab University between the IJT, Pashtuns and Baluch Students in January, 2018. The IJT has even kidnapped the students from Seraiki Council. The FIR about terrorism was filed against the involved students. The culture of politics and involvement of political parties must be discouraged at campus level. (Shehzad, 2018).

The incidents of violent extremism at campus shows that it is not only the Madrassas that is generating extremists but the universities are following the same trend. According to Sindh counter terrorism department, among 500 militants in police custody, 64 have master's degree and 70 are bachelors. The Pakistani youth are radicalized and turned militants in universities. The Nation Action Plan has suggested the registration of madrassas and the check on distribution of extremist literature in campuses. (Zardari, 2017)

There is a long list of university graduates involved in extremism and terrorism that's Omar Saeed Sheikh (murderer of Daniel Pearl), Naeem Noor Khan (Al-Qaeda IT expert), Dr Arshad Waheed (Al-Qaeda Operative), Faisal Shehzad, Hamad Adil and Owais Jhakrani who are the true examples of being radicalized at campuses with educated middle class family backgrounds. (Rana, 2015).

Despite of the fact that Ansar-ul-Shariah, a militant organization, was operating from Karachi University and they killed several policemen and a retired army colonel. The Vice Chancellor denied it and called it a headache for security agencies, not for university administration. According to the police chief, the extremist students got degrees in Applied Physics from Karachi University and others are from different universities in Karachi. The unsuccessful assassination attempt on the Sindh Assembly's leader of opposition marked the killing of one of the graduate of Karachi University, who got PhD. (Hoodbhoy, 2017).

A student from Bannu in UET Peshawar, Adnan Abdul Qadir, was beaten by the activist students of Islami Jamiat Talaba for listening loud music in his hostel room in March, 2010. After exchange of harsh words, they beat him with hockey sticks and cricket bat and he went to coma in Lady Reading hospital, Peshawar. This incident caused serious strikes from boys and girls and extreme disturbing in the academic session of University of Peshawar and University of Engineering and technology, Peshawar. (Dawn News, 2010)

A student of journalism was lynched by his fellow student in the accusation of blasphemy in Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. Mashal Khan was tortured, beaten and shot by enraged students on 13 April, 2017. Later, the investigation report revealed that he was not involved in any blasphemous activity. Two days before the sad incident, he gave an interview to the news channel, complaining about the administrative issues and increasing fees in AWKUM. The police report had showed that he was accused of blasphemy by the administration and it was all pre-planned to check him from taking any bold step against university administration. Extremism has so badly caught the educational institutions of Pakistan and the religious

radicalism was used to mobilize the masses. The charge of Blasphemy is such a sensitive issue that it can cause the death penalty and the unproven accusation can also cause lynching and violence.

Mashal was neither the first one nor the last to be the victim of religious prejudice that has deep roots in our society. The motive for this killing was silencing an outspoken and brilliant student, who stood against the administration for corruption, mismanagement and other misconducts in the campus. The decades long nurture to the extremism and violence by the state has caused the space shrink for the rational and positive thinking. The political leaders have to amend and modify the Blasphemy law, so to stop its misuse and avoid the incidents like Mardan in the future. (Hussain, April 19, 2017).

The universities are very reluctant towards the debate on religious issues. There is a great difference between religious fidelity and religious radicalism and they both need to be addressed. The lack of cultural activities and the cultural deprivation in students shows their desire for freedom and joy. The cultural desertification has increased so widely in universities as well. It is natural that vacuum has to be filled and this cultural vacuum is definitely filled by the extremist organization on campuses. (Hoodbhoy, 2017).

Some social classes are deprived of political rights and this political deprivation is so grave in some regions that they resort to violent means to gain their political rights. Balochistan and Tribal Areas are the examples of this issue where various factors had promoted violence and extremism. (Rana, 2012).

### **The Menace of Extremism in Schools**

In Pakistan, violent extremism have badly caught the primary and secondary schools that are facing intolerance from the extremist and radicalized factors of society. According to Global Terrorism Database, from 2007 to 2015, 867 attacks were carried out on educational institutions. According to the 2015 report of Ministry for States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), 360 schools were destroyed in FATA, Pakistan. The investigation reports revealed that the culprits were not only the Tehreek-e-Taliban but in much cases the common people of society were found involved in such attacks. This investigation report shows the extremist tendencies of the society towards education. Attack on Malala Yousafzai in Swat on October 9, 2012, indicates and highlights the threats to educational institutions of Pakistan. Attacks on schools will not only affect the students and their families but will deter the growth of Pakistani society. (Human Rights Watch, 2017)

In December, 2014 an attack on APS Peshawar brought the army and ruling government on the same page against extremism and terrorism and presented the Nation Action plan to counter extremism. This plan was not effective because after that 34 incidents happened that caused the killing of 657 lives till October, 2017. The reason behind this is that, most extremist groups have the support at both macro and micro levels from deprived and isolated ethnic and religious minorities in the state. Along with that the most powerful, educated and fortunate people are also involved in supporting them for their political means. (Yaseen and Muzaffar, 2018).

### **Causes of Extremism, Violence and Terrorism**

#### **Misuse of Religion for Extremism**

Lal Masjid incident was the military operation carried out by Pakistan army against the militants in Islamabad Madrassah in 2007, under the name of Operation Sunrise. The incident of Lal Masjid is termed and remembered as one of the deadliest fight between Pakistan military

and militants grown and nurtured in homeland. Lal Masjid incident is also an example of extremism, violence, terrorism and radicalization in educational institutes whether it is madrassah or a university. Thus, the presence of extremist elements in educational institution is not a new phenomenon. Lal Masjid was a sort of camp for the militants and terrorist nurtured and trained inside the territory of Madrassah. After the Lal Masjid siege, more than 88 bombings took place killing 1,188 people. After the death of the Ghazi Abdul Rashid, the head of the organization, he became a source of inspiration for militants. More than 70 percent of the students injured in the madrassah operation were from FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and many of them went back to their hometown just to join the militant organizations. The attack on the Ismaili bus in Karachi by a student of IBA is also an example of religious motivated extremism. (Hussain, May 13, 2017)

The killing of Mashal Khan in AWKUM shows that it is easy to kill or enrage the mob in the name of faith. The administration members that were against Mashal Khan alleged him with the charge of blasphemy. The religious sentiments are used for violence in universities and most of the religious sects are targeted in campuses. (Hussain, April 19, 2017)

A professor Khalid Hameed was stabbed to death by a 3<sup>rd</sup> year student for anti-Islam remarks in Government Sadiq Egerton College, Bahawalpur. The intolerance and extremist views of the students is an alarming thing for the progress of society. The slow justice system of Pakistan is one of the reasons why most of the people respond violently to things like blasphemy and anti-Islam statements. (Imran, March 20, 2019)

### **Loopholes in Administrative Setup**

The loopholes in administrative setup, security measures and discipline is the main reason behind the case of extremism in education institutions of Pakistan. These factors lead to the penetration of violent extremism and militancy into the campuses. The political affiliations in administration are the main reason why the political parties are so powerful at campus and how easily they can threaten the academia and administration. This is difficult for the security forces, deployed in campuses, to check on such activities due to the political bodies pressure which many bodies in administration do allow. The example of NUST must be considered, where strict security measures have failed all such attempts of violent extremism. (Mehmood, J. 2017)

### **Role of Social Media**

The violent extremist groups have strong networks on internet through social media. Social media is a source of recruiting new members including higher education institutes' students. ISIS alone have hundreds of social media accounts with at least 46000 twitter accounts operating. (Silva, 2016)

The lynching of Mashal Khan is the consequence of social media movement against him as he was accused of posting blasphemous stuff on his facebook account, which was a false allegation. (Hussain, April 19, 2017).

### **Radicalization of Students**

Radicalization is one of the issues Pakistan is facing in post war on terror time. The students of Jamia Hafsa, a madrassah with Lal Masjid, were involved in kidnapping the policemen and beauticians from parlour. These madrassah students occupied the government official buildings and forced government for the enforcement of Shariah with threats of massive suicide attacks. In the post War on Terror times till 2015, 400 suicide attacks took place in Dera Ismail Khan, Peshawar, Quetta and Tribal agencies of Mohmand and Bajaur. (COISS Report, May 05, 2020).



In Pakistan, several factors have contributed to the sectarianism and radicalization of the society and universities, as the institute of society had suffered a lot in this context. The discrimination at campuses on the basis of ethnicities, sects and religions are adding to the problem of intolerance and extremism. The hate preachers are actively contributing to the process of radicalization without any check and balance on them.

Even after the costs Pakistan had paid for the extremism and terrorism, some segments in Pakistan have sympathies with the militant organizations and sectarian activists and justify and support them. This has enabled the environment for the militant organizations to operate on every level. (Haque 2014).

A study by British council have examined 300 to 400 militants which were engineers, doctors, business graduates or scientists but no political scientist or anthropologist were found in such extremist cases. The reason behind this crisis is the curriculum that is lacking in the university to develop critical thinking instead of blindly following everything. (Wajeeh, 2018)

### **The Role of Politics in Extremism at Education Institutes**

Universities in Pakistan are involved in politics rather than in learning and developing critical thinking. Administration is being more influenced by the political parties and ruling government. The incidents in universities are mostly covered and defended by the political parties. Promotions, recruitments and inductions are influenced and carried out by the governments in which they recruit their own people. The violence was carried out on the religious grounds, especially in blasphemy cases and un-Islamic practices. The mis-interpretation of religious ideas is the source of radicalization in the society and these have made the youth at universities to impose their own ideas and opinions. (Khan 2019)

### **Conclusion**

In Pakistan, extremism and radicalization and its various manifestations can be seen anywhere in the society, especially after Afghan War and War on Terror. The universities and other educational institutions are under the severe form of violent extremism and radicalization. There are several reasons behind this evil on the educational grounds. Sectarianism has its deep roots in colleges and universities. In the last two decades, the violence in campus has increased to double folds under the context of blasphemy charges, unacceptable campus rules, nationalism, sectarianism and political activities.

War on terror left a very negative impact on the society of Pakistan as well as on the youth. The university students were made to read the jihadi literature and watch the videos of torture by US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, which has incited them to indulge in religious and ethnic extremist groups. The province of KP and Merged area (ex-FATA) has suffered a lot in this regard due to the 2240km of border with Afghanistan. In 2014 and 2016, APS School and Bacha Khan University Charsadda were attacked respectively with loss of 143 school students and 20 university students.

Pakistani society has been caught in the evil of violent extremism because of ignorance, illiteracy and war against terrorism. Pakistan has been facing threats from almost all the border whether they are sectarian, military or the Taliban from Afghanistan. The war ravaged Afghanistan has a long 2240km border with Pakistan which has suffered the society of Pakistan in a negative way, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region and ex-FATA. The universities are facing the issues of violence, discrimination, radicalization and extremism.



There is evidence to suggest that most of the youth and common people consider jihad and extremist activities as a source of earning and most of the students and youth are occupying it due to unemployment. (Khan 2019)

The schooling and basic education have a great role in development of mindset and psychology of the student. The analysis of the research reveals that it is the schooling where the extremist mindset is developed and in university these students get the space and time to show up with their violent ideas. It is not the madrassah where extremist minds are nurtured but the public and private schools which are also a part of radicalization process in the society.

University administration has failed in tackling the issue of extremism and sectarianism in the campus. The reason behind this failure is the political wings and their on campus political activities. The administration and department are influenced by the leaders of political parties for their own vested interests. Thus, the administration tried to implement the rules and regulations on the student but on the other hand, they have defended the culprits of violent activities.

The curriculum of colleges and universities are not enough to de-radicalize the extremist mindset. An inclusive curriculum should be introduced which can teach conflict resolution, peace and critical thinking. The curriculum being taught in the last 40 years is the same and relies in the past without teaching the solutions for the present and future crisis.

The religious parties have been platform for extremism and radicalization. The members of IJT have been involved in murder of students in UET, Peshawar and AWKUM, for loud music and on the basis of false blasphemy allegations respectively. The religious parties do not allow musical gatherings and specific seminars and conferences in the campuses. Other political parties have also been a part of using violent measure in campus for their political aims.

The socio-economic deprivation in Pakistani society has encouraged the extremist group to hire the youth on monthly stipend. In context of campus violence, the extremist students were from an affluent and stable family background. It is not the financial backwardness that leads to such ideas but the extremist mindset.

Social media is a good tool for the activists to recruit new members and to develop an opinion of the people. University administration has to work against the culture of guns and drugs for the successful elimination of extremist and violent elements.

The national and provincial governments have passed many laws and bill in a war against terrorism and extremism but none could be implemented in a true spirit. The National Action Plan in 2014 was joint agreement of all parties against terrorism, under which a detailed plan was designed to clean up the educational institutes from the extremist minds but not much impact could be seen.

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