

Topic:-

The Rise of Extremism in Pakistan:
A Consequence of Foreign Interventions
or Domestic Failures?

A. Introduction

a. Hook

b. Why extremism exists in societies

c. Thesis statement

B. Understanding the rise of extremism in Pakistan

C. Extremism in Pakistan is a result of domestic failures or foreign interventions?

D. Domestic failures that led to rise in extremism in Pakistan

i) Neglect towards persistent poverty;
a) Extremist incidents in KP.

ii) Increasing religious conservatism;
a) Taranwala incident 2023.

iii) Lack of quality education;
a) LUMS vs ^{Islamic} ~~Tara~~ University

iv) Mal-policing by government regarding national security;
a) Afghan Mujahideen to Afghan terrorists

v) Ignorance towards gender inequality;
a) literacy rate of men versus women of Pakistan.

vi) Inter-provincial political disparity;
a) Quota for Balochistan

compared to Punjab in National Assembly.

vii) Structural differences among provinces;

a) Technological advancements in Lahore versus Peshawar

viii) Basic rights violations of public;

a) Operation Zarb-e-Azb and mass killing of people.

ix) Irresponsible use of mass media;

a) Headlines in news such as "Islamic Extremist Groups"

E. Measures to overcome the failures and mitigate extremism

i) Poverty eradication;

a) Grameen Bank in Bangladesh as model

ii) Community based deradicalization programmes;

a) Deradicalization Programme in Swat

iii) Equitable development programs among provinces;

a) Metro bus services provision in every province.

F. Conclusion.

The Essay

"The path to extremism often begins not with a grand political awakening, but with a deeply personal vulnerability: a search for identity, a need to belong, or a desire for revenge for perceived mistreatment." Since past few decades Pakistan has been grappled with incidents of extremism. Not only Pakistan, but whole world is facing this issue but five countries - Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Iraq and Syria constituted world's **72%** of lives lost due to terrorism in a single year 2024. This highlights the need to analyse the root causes of rise of such extremists. All the above mentioned countries are not only present in Asia but also in close proximity. Though incidents of extremism happen in other parts of world but recurring mishaps in some particular regions compelled analysts to observe the reasons. Analysts say that extremism in societies is a major result of perceived injustice, identity loss and social issues like poverty, lack of education and gender inequality. Unfortunately, these problems are not only prevalent in Pakistan but also greatly ignored despite repetitive extremist accidents. In this essay,

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reasons for extremism in Pakistan and its increase will be discussed, followed by measures to reduce such societal malady.

Pakistan - since past few years have consistently been facing extremist backed issues ranging from small scale public dissent to social media extremist campaigns to major attacks like that of APS - Peshawar attack (2014). Initially, there existed extremism - a prominent example of it is separation of Bangladesh, but major surge is seen after Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. This not only turned Afghan talibaan against Pakistan but also lead to movements like Pushtoon Tahaffuz Movement, and other militant groups like TTP, BLA, lashkar-e-Jhangvi, lashkar-e-Taiba etc. Uprisings in Balochistan are a result of inadequate political representation, poor resources access and marginalized identity. In Sindh, conflicts between Sindhi ethnicity and Muhajir ethnicity exists ~~are~~ due to deeply rooted historical, linguistic, demographic and economic factors. In short, the extremist narratives and acts exist and increase day by day in Pakistan but the question arises that whether foreign interventions are the major drivers of this mischief or it is the domestic failure

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that has led to increased public discord.

Nations do not fail to rise if equipped with quality education, provided justice and treated equally. But if opposite is done, no doubt there increases social unrest, weak rule of law and public discontent. Foreign interventions could affect the nations only when home governments devoid the public of their basic rights such as education, security, justice etc. If domestically the problems are solved, there arises a social cohesion which could never be broken by any foreign power. As it is famously said, education makes people easy to lead, but difficult to drive, easy to govern but impossible to enslave. Lack of quality education and access of it has been a significant cause of increasing strife in Pakistan. Along with other factors such as poverty, interprovincial disparities and religious extremism have played vital role in perpetuating the issue. Governments who timely address the problems of its public prevent it from being influenced by extremist ~~not~~ actions but failure to address it gives easy path to foreign powers to exploit nations for their interests. Unfortunately, in Pakistan multiple governments came and went but all failed to ~~redress~~ address the issues of public which has led

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to increasing extremism with each day. Hence, it would be wrong to blame foreign interventions for being a reason of rising extremism, rather it is the domestic failures which have led to increase in negative sentiments of people.

On reaching to the conclusion that these are the domestic failures or lapses which had led to rise in extremism in Pakistan, now each structural, political or social lapse will be discussed to illustrate the stance of calling domestic failures as leading cause of rising extremism in Pakistan.

Beginning with the most important factor of rising extremism that is poverty. Pakistani population has been divided distinctly into various classes based on their income. The lower middle classes and ~~middle~~ lower class people have been seen in extremist activities. This showcases the importance of alleviating poverty among people to prevent them from being involved in state-unfriendly activities. Undoubtedly, Pakistani governments and NGOs has failed to fully analyse the situation and take steps accordingly which has resulted in increase in extremist narratives. Increasing extremist incidents, especially that in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, where a significant population lives a life below poverty

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line is a major example illustrating how poverty shapes the minds of people. Hence, it is imperative to take measures by job creation, easy loans provision etc to reduce poverty and also the extremism.

Increasing conservative interpretations of Islamic teachings, especially by few religious scholars is a leading cause of rising extremism among people. Scholars are supposed to spread teachings of tolerance, patience, civic education but badly few scholars promote opposite teachings such as hatred towards other sects or non-Muslims. This results in dangerous societal incidents because such scholars are followed by multiple people. The Jaranwala incident 2023 where a Christian community and church was destroyed by an extremist mob on false allegations of blasphemy, lays evidence that how religious conservatism and extremism leads to overall social unrest. Hence, it is vital to spread moderate Islamic teachings to maintain social order.

Additionally, quality education has been another important issue. Failure of state in providing quality education to students has led to increase in

extremist narratives. Quality education means inculcating abilities of critical thinking, tolerance and respecting others opinions.

But in Pakistan, focus has only been given on rote memorization without fully comprehending the meanings of texts.

The syllabus included some extreme narratives such as words like "war, violence, terrorism" of in very junior classes. And in universities, again few universities tend to promote rationality and critical thinking - but they are very limited. On the other hand most of the universities still follow the old

procedures of rote memorization, failing to generate critical thinking ability in them.

This can be seen by the comparison of LUMS and Islamic University. Both universities produce graduates but LUMS graduates are seen as being more tolerant towards others as compared to IUI.

Hence, quality education provision to inculcate tolerance and acceptance towards others is vital, while breaking the walls of extremism.

A major blame goes to the mal-policing practices by government officials which has failed to fully comprehend the cultural and demographic factors of communities. Resultantly, policies ^{are} ~~were~~ made which ^{are} ~~were~~ inappropriate

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with regard to a particular group.

In other words, short term gains are the priority of government while ignoring the consequences of long term future.

For example, during the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, Pakistan trained Afghan Mujahideen while giving them weapons and education which was extreme in nature. For a time being, it had been beneficial for Pakistan, but after the withdrawal of Soviet Union, the Afghan Mujahideen turned against Pakistan itself and now the insurgent and terrorist activities happening in Pakistan is a result of training of Afghan Mujahideen, hence a policy shift from Afghan Mujahideen to Afghan terrorists. This paradigm shift illustrates how important is right policing while analysing the longterm consequences.

Hence, making moderate policies which would neither compromise national sovereignty nor security is imperative to reduce extremism.

Apart from above mentioned domestic ills that lead to extremism in Pakistan, the other one is neglect towards the issue of gender inequality in Pakistan. Though initiatives have been taken to empower women and third genders by government and other non-governmental organizations, these are

small scale steps. These are inadequate to fulfill the existing excessive gap between gender equality. Due to lack of equality especially among women and third genders, there have been persistent discontent of these two groups towards state as well as society. The inequality gap could be analysed by the huge difference in literary rates of men and women. Women in Pakistan have literary rate of only 52% while that of men is 74%.

highlighting the immense gender inequality being practiced by societies. This is a leading reason of extremism among women and third gender people, so taking initiatives to bring equality among all genders is helpful for mitigating the existing extremism in Pakistan.

Furthermore, inter-provincial political disparity has been another important factor for extremism in people of Pakistan. The perceived injustice, identity loss and absence of sense of belonging has perpetuated negative sentiments among people. People from different provinces demand for equal representation in various political platforms but its unavailability - to some extent has strengthened their pre-existing grievances. For example, this can be seen by the quota of Balochistan versus

Punjab in National Assembly, though seats allocated ~~on~~ based on population, economic contribution etc, but still very few seats for Balochistan in National Assembly (20) as compared to that of Punjab (173) has raised grievances among people. Such grievances further lead to violent actions so timely addressal of such matters is necessary to ~~p~~ prevent extremism.

Moreover, structural differences among various provinces has lead to rise in public discontent. Excessive development in few provinces while devoiding others with even basic necessities have raised concerns among public and failure of government to address their concerns and use of hard power against them have increased people's extremist sentiments. For instance, technological advancement in Lahore is far better and ahead ~~that~~ than that of Peshawar. Despite contributing approximately 15% to the economy of Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa lags behind compared to Punjab. This lack of technological advancement has further led to minimum or even negligible job opportunities, hence not improve in the poverty^{vato} of people. This

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Structural difference has led to increase in extremism which could only be mitigated by initiating developmental projects in other provinces also.

Subsequently, persistent violations of basic rights of people have raised extremist sentiments among the people of Pakistan. Human rights are inviolable even if there is a perceived security threat. Philosopher John Locke argued that state exists to protect life, liberty and property of its citizens yet it must operate under the rule of law. However, failure of Pakistan's government to protect lives of people during military operations such as Operation Zarb-e-Aziz and Operation Raddul-Fasad, in which there were mass killings of people of KPK, have increased public discord against state. Hence, balancing counter-terrorism measures with human rights is vital to mitigate future risks of rising extremism among people of Pakistan.

Finally, the irresponsible journalism of mass media has been a great contributor in perpetuating extremist narratives among people of Pakistan. Persistent spreading of fake

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news, unchecked journalism, and association of illegal actions with a certain group creates among the audience hatred towards that particular group and thus making its way towards intense extremism. Furthermore, politicization of media has also been a great reason. ~~For~~ Also, media has been more concerned about getting views than spreading information, hence the use of highlights such as "Extremist Islamist Groups" have created among people prejudice against islamic groups. Responsible journalism could be helpful in mitigating the existing extremist narratives.

Various domestic failures which has lead to extremist ideas among people of Pakistan have been discussed. Following are some of the important measures which would help in reducing extremism among people of Pakistan.

Beginning with poverty eradication, as it has to be said that poverty is the leading cause of social evils, extremism is one of them. Hence, eradicating or atleast reducing poverty by creating jobs, or easy

loans for business startups could be beneficial. If poverty is fire, opportunity douses that fire. Grameen Bank of Bangladesh which grants easy loans to poor communities and marginalised groups, has helped reduce poverty to great extent. Hence, taking lessons from this model could help in reducing poverty in Pakistan and hence reducing extremist narratives.

Secondly, community based deradicalization programs can have major impact in mindsets of people. These deradicalization programs equip individuals with moderate education, vocational and technical training, job opportunities and reintegration into society. Hence, such deradicalization programs help mitigate extremism. Pakistan's initiative such as "Deradicalization Programme in Swat" has been highly helpful in reducing the hatred and prejudice among at risk youth.

Thirdly, equitable developmental initiatives in every province can be a strong message for the at risk youth of them being heard and important. When such youth sees their provinces

being developed like others, it will reduce the extremism present among them. But if neglected and situation remains same, there is a great chance that the existing extremism would lead to a greater uprising. For example, providing metro bus services at every province and other such facilities would help in mitigating the extremist narratives.

In conclusion, the extremism in Pakistan has been a pressing issue since past few decades whose major reasons are perceived injustices, identity loss, poverty and lack of education. All these ills are due to failure of domestic policies and public interests' absense. Hence, blaming foreign powers to be sole reason of rising extremism in Pakistan would be wrong. Rather, it is the lapse in home policies related to social, political or structural aspects. If such issues are addressed by government and NGOs and civil societies play their roles there is no doubt that a Pakistan with healthy minds will

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appear on the world which would not only eradicate extremist narratives from itself but also play a stewardship role for world in eradicating poverty. After all, blaming a hammer for building the wrong structure is misplaced, rather the fault lies in how the tool is used. Hence, instead of blaming foreign powers for inculcating extremism in Pakistan, leveraging the rich demography, culture and soft power would help in eradicating this malady from mother country.

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