



## Factors Responsible for Promoting Religious Extremism in Pakistan: A Case of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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### Abstract

*Religious extremism is related to religion and sensation and has become a global issue, but since long, Pakistan has been considered among those countries that have been the Centre of it. Pakistan has been considered by the world community, as the cause as well as the victim of terrorism and extremism. It is a complicated phenomenon and needs exploring all the social, religious, economic, political and sectarian factors behind it. There are different reasons, causes, sources and factors of extremism and terrorism in the region in general and in Pakistan in particular. Explanation of all these factors is primarily important for understanding this evil in Pakistan and the region. The researcher has tried to find briefly those factors that promoted religious extremism in the society in Pakistan in generally and Pashtun community specifically. The researcher has tried to find out a solution to these factors to combat it in the future.*

**Key Words:** Religious Extremism, Pashtun, Taliban

### Introduction

There are various factors responsible for the promotion of religious extremism in Pakistan. They are discussed below.

### Soviet Union Invasion of Afghanistan and its Aftermath

The rise of religious extremism in Pakistan started from the USSR intervention in December 1979, against which many traditional leaders and mullahs rebelled in Afghanistan. Almost five million Afghans became refugees, left their homes and stayed in Pakistan Pashtun populated areas, like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan, and Tribal areas. The Pashtuns welcomed and treated them as their brothers. This war was fought by the slogan of holy war (Jihad) with the co-operation of US, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, China, Pakistan, and other Muslims and European countries. All supported the massive Jihad against the Soviet Union. Pakistan and its intelligence agencies supported the religious parties and their followers, Particularly the Jamaat-e-Islami and its extremist wing. The union of all these countries with the support of the internal and external religious extremists, the Soviet Union surrendered and withdrew its armies from Afghanistan in 1989. However, the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, the trained militants and extremist groups in Afghanistan radicalized Muslims throughout the world and, particularly in Pakistani society (Hilali, 2017).

### Role of Pakistan

The army in Pakistan is a major stakeholder in domestic and foreign affairs. After independence, Indian factor remained a permanent threat to our security. To counter India, Pakistan armed forces and intelligence agencies always supported the religious extremists as strategic assets. During the US war on terror, it supported the Taliban and has accused Al-Qaeda. The operation held in Swat and South Waziristan against TTP was mainly focused on enemy groups in Mehsud and other tribal territories. The Haqqani network in North Waziristan has been remained untouched even today. The US severally demanded to launch the operation against Haqqani network but was ignored. Pakistan wished and desired to have a peace agreement with the Haqqani network in Afghanistan (Moeed, 2011). The question arises here that which group was considered a Haqqani network? The

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US and other powers are still confused about who to make an agreement with. The founding fathers of Haqqani network Jalal-u-Din Haqqani and Siraj-u-Din Haqqani have a close relation with terrorist organizations inside and outside Pakistan. Besides this, their relationship has been proven with other religious extremist organizations in Pakistan like Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Jaish-e-Muhammad. It is an open secret, although most of the people will not believe this connection, time will prove it as true. The relation of some groups of extremist Taliban gives birth to grievances and concerns inside the institution because some of the officials of the armed forces were not in favor of relation with such section of the extremist (Ahmad, 2016).

During the Afghan war, Pakistan adopted the policy of strategic depth towards Afghanistan. The Afghan government showed serious reservations over Pakistan's policies of supporting extremist groups. However, if we look to history, besides Pakistan's support, people always joined hands in the region when they felt that Islam is under threat. The region has always played a pivotal role in defending the region and its religious values. The current secular Afghan nationalist narrative is contrary to past history. The Pashtuns are inhabited in areas which are always used for war purpose with nationalism or Islamism. Religious extremism and radicalism get power with the geostrategic factor in these areas. Pakistan and its allies supported the holy war against the Soviet Union from 1979-1988. The role and influence of so-called Jihadists increased in Pakistan and Afghanistan in general and in Pashtun society particular (Howard, 1983).

### **Emergence of Taliban**

Extremism and radicalism were fortified with the sustenance provided to extremist Taliban in Afghanistan by the government of Pakistan after their emergence in 1994. Pakistan supported the extremist and radical Taliban to favor their own policies towards Afghanistan. This method of extremist and war policies will keep India away from Afghanistan. Pakistan supported and helped the Taliban and provided safe-havens to go and fight against anti-Pakistan forces in Afghanistan. The Pro-Pakistani Taliban have always used to fight against NATO forces in Afghanistan, but their presence in the tribal areas, inspired and motivated the Pashtun community towards extremism. This was the reason that the extremists formed their own organization in 2007, called Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to assist the Afghan Taliban. To resist against the US in Afghanistan, they also resisted against Pakistan on becoming an ally of the US in the war on terror. They attacked and killed hundreds of Pakistani armed forces and security persons. They killed thousands of civilians on behalf of hard stance against extremists and terrorists. Most of their commanders and followers were Pashtun and affiliated with the Deobandi school of thought. No doubt they have close relations and support of the religious parties in Pakistan like JI and JUI. Even the leader of the religious party (JUI F) Maulana Samiulhaq called Taliban their sons (Charles & Mahmood, 2002).

### **Role of Madrassas**

Madrassas achieved pioneer place as religious, social and cultural institutions in Pakistani society in general and Pashtun in particular. They were established for Islamic studies, studies of the Quran, Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence. In Pakistan, a large number of madrassas were established which provided shelter, free education and food to their students. Most of the population in Pakistan is below poverty line, having large families, and most of the people used to send their children to Islamic madrassas due to having no sufficient amount of money for admitting them in modern schools and colleges. According to one estimate, there are 40,000 registered and unregistered madrassas in Pakistan (Saleem Hassan, 2009). The madrassas play an important role in the uplift of the country's economic conditions, but after the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan, the madrassas produced religious extremists instead of valuable students and teachers in society. These madrassas were used as fuel in the proxy war between the US and USSR. The increasing religious extremism and radicalization left bad impacts on Pashtun society in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Shamila N, 2015).

### **The Radical Sectarian Nexus**

There has been a relation between Jihadist and anti-Shia organizations in Pakistan having the motives to fight against the Shia community. They also used to support and fought against Shias in Iran and Iraq. All these groups have been supporting and operating by Saudi Arabia. There are other contributory elements added to the list

promoting religious extremism in Pakistan. I have described earlier that Pakistan develops a narrative of limited statehood based identity. In the case of foreign policy, Pakistan supported all those religious extremist organizations supported by Saudi Arabia in South Asia, South West and the Middle East. The religious extremists always remained a part of Pakistan's foreign policy. The religious political parties in Pakistan JUI and JI always remained a part of a proxy war and a large number of conflicts in the Middle East. These parties always supported and protested against Israel's occupation of Palestine. They used to protest and condemn any action against the Islamic community in the world (Moonis, 2007). According to the former secretary of Pakistan, Riaz Muhammad Khan, "we have Deobandi and Saudi Salafist inspiration, who injected madrassas grooming in Pakistan during 1980s-1990s. During this period a large donation has been raised in the Gulf state, particularly in Saudi Arabia. The close relation of Al-Qaeda with Tanzeemat is also due to the Saudi government" (Khan, 2011).

It is a general opinion of the common people that in Pakistan the Jihadists have autonomous bodies and structure. It is the need of time that Pakistan should restore its writ inside the country and control all the extremist organizations having links with some violent groups. The increasing radicalization in the state has heinously affected the socio-cultural and economy. The instability in the country compelled the business community to flow its capital from Pakistan. The extremist organization Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Siaph-e-Sahaba (SSP) Pakistan have a close relation with sectarian extremist groups pro-Saudi and anti-Iran. Most of them are influenced by the Deobandi School of Thought. Most of these groups have close links and influence from the two parliamentary parties i.e. JUI and JI (Zahab, 2002).

### **Sharia Bill in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

In 2003, the then NWFP, now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) government brought Sharia Bill to implement this law over the province. After Nawaz Sharif, MMA was the first to bring Sharia bill in the province. The bill was framed by 21 members of the Nifaz-e-Shariah Council, constitute for Islamization of Pashtun society. This was another democratic step to promote religious extremism in Pashtun populated areas. This bill covered all aspects of government, such as Judiciary, legislative, executive, education, discouraging bribery, protection to the life of citizen, obscenity and social evils, promotion of Islamic values in media and introduction of an interest-free economic system in the province. Indeed, it was the first constitutional and institutional efforts to further Islamize Khyber Pakhtunkhwa already facing the existence of religious extremism. The Pashtun community loves Islam but it does not mean that they will do nothing else except preaching, promoting and imposing Islamic values (Mehboob, 2011).

### **Islamic Foreign Policy**

After the independence of Pakistan, the foreign policy was announced on Islamic principles having to sound strange, strengthened religious extremism. All these events compelled T.V Paul, to term Pakistan as a "warrior state". It originates rentier profits by misusing its strategic space for foreign policy objectives; in the process, it achieves modernization of its defense capabilities, including building a nuclear capability and also obtains development funds. However, the latter remained of secondary significance. Pakistan and some other states of Europe and Asia have been transformed into global players, but Pakistan failed to prove itself like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. Pakistan is remembered as worrier state in the world due to war policy and strong support to religious, extremist and fundamentalist groups. No one can deny Pakistan's importance in the region, but it is also a fact that it always used its territory against neighbors' states. This was another cause that promoted religious extremism in Pakistan in general and Pashtun society particular (Paul, 2014).

### **Misinterpretation of Jihad**

Different concepts and definitions of Islam and Jihad were used by various religious clerics and other scholars that perseveres in the minds of the people. Some among them have opinions that Islam is a religion of wars and battles i.e. extremism while others linked it to terrorism. But it is a fact that Islam is the most peaceful religion derived from the Arabic word "Salmathi" (peace) has never been promoted and instead encouraged extremism and terrorism. Yes, you can blame the individuals and their different ways of interpreting it, but no religion of the

world is promoting extremism and terrorism. All religions of the world are promoting humanity and peace. Islam always prefers peace, moderation, and tolerance. Islam forbids the killing of a human without justification and crime and is considered as equivalent to the entire humanity. Likewise, different concepts of Jihad are also stirring human minds and the slanted concept is being promoted universally. The most common misunderstanding established by the Muslims themselves. Various scholars have defined Jihad tantamount to Qital (war). On the other hand, after September 11, 2001, Islam was considered an extremist religion for promoting extremism and terrorism. The West thinks that Islam is promoting fear and terror for the fulfillment of its objectives. It is wrong to blame Islam due to misconducts of some Muslims, especially when their activities and methods are contrasted to Islamic values and teachings. Islam believes in peaceful co-existence and is the most liberal religion in the world. Islam does not permit violence and terrorism except self-defense. Islam prefers humanity and protection of humanity, promotion of Social welfare, human right and rights of animals and other species (Jessica, 2000).

### **Unemployment and Suicidal Poverty**

The lethargic human and economic development procedure, and the rise in huge population and unequal division of resources established a large number of groups, having no employment and other basic needs. A large number of unemployed students of madrassas consist of youth, create a devastating situation in the country. The increase in poverty also helps to strengthen the roots of religious extremists and suicide bombers.

Most of extremist and fundamentalist groups consist of all those people, having no jobs, then they join the extremist and terrorist organizations. Most of the people having no jobs and having low incomes become liable to move towards violent and extremist activities. It is a fact that low income and economic inequality lead to revolution. So the growing inflation and unemployment compel people to admit their children in religious madrassas which brainwash them for extremist activities against those having a large amount of wealth. They are then likely starting their journey on any avenue that offers them an opportunity to make the two ends meet (Dilip, 2014).

### **The decline in Tradition of Ijtihad**

The decline in Ijtihad, regarding the true essence, in the light of the Holy Quran and hadith, religious extremism, fundamentalism, and violence rise in Muslim societies. The word Jihad has been defined in limited terminology having use of the sword. The real Jihad is against self (Nafas) if anyone controls his/her own self and does not hurt anyone, is considered the best type of Jihad. The part of Jihad is not applicable in the modern world except for self-defense. In the modern age of science and technology war will not be fought with swords and conventional weapons, but with nuclear and other poisonous weapons. The definition of swords was used during the age of the Prophet (PBUH), but today we need Ijtihad to make our society safe and sound from external threats. In the modern world, we need to use ijthad and fight jihad against poverty, unemployment and basic health needs, instead of war with others. We should not poke our noses in others' war, so no one will pose their noses to us. The decline of the established tradition of jihad's interpretation of Quran by Muslim clerics to apply Quranic laws to changing circumstances has led to rigid and narrow interpretations of religious precepts, particularly about the concept of jihad. If we did not follow ijthad, narrated by the prophet and Quran, we will be facing a dangerous situation in the modern world of technology. We need peace in our land and ijthad to avoid the traditional definitions of Jihad. Uneducated and low-income people will follow the traditional ways of Jihad because they believe in violent and extremist policies instead of peaceful co-existence (Nazeer, 2007).

### **Economic Factors**

The famous statement of Aristotle that "economic inequality leads to revolution". The economic inequality became a strong cause for rising religious extremism and fundamentalism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Economic deprivation and poverty, below the national average, provide the opportunity to the extremists and radicals in order to criticize the government policies for failure. They will argue that government did not fulfill its promises for the protection of the population and break the social contract between the state and downgraded population.

The economic deprivation leads to social evils and does not lead to radicalism, but prepares the extremist militant groups to contextualize their appeals for sound and popular support in challenge the state under the slogans of equity, social justice, and equal opportunity. These were the tactics used by the extremists and radical heads that go popular among the masses. These slogans attract the common masses. Those, having religious mind, support imitating of Islamic mode of state, existed during the Caliphs of Islam. They preferred the Islamic model and its implications over the state, the less economic opportunities in a society, the more will be extremism and terrorism in the state. The Pashtun population, after independence, faced a lot of suffering and hardships. The region was used as a war zone, and never preferred its development. The region faced a large number of wars in different eras and periods. Most of the Pashtun population is working as laborers in various countries, due to having lack of knowledge and skills. The strong reason that promotes religious extremism was an economic cause (Irshad, 2011).

### **Role of US Policies**

The policies of the United States of America, have provoked religious extremists in the Muslims world, particularly in Pakistan. The US interference in Pakistan's policies since long and especially after September 11, 2001 attack and war on terror created the rise of religious extremism in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The US demand for doing more has created conflict, inside Pakistan and various groups retaliated against the state. After seventeen years of war on terror, the US has lost much of its goodwill. Due to war policies, the US lost its moral foundation, and resultantly anti-US sentiments emerged within the global world. The anti-Muslim policies decreased its image and morale in world politics because she was not ready to listen to anyone. Due to the US war policies, extremism and terrorism increased instead of decreasing especially in the Muslim world (Baloch, 2006).

After USSR intervention in Afghanistan, it attracted global attention, and it also alarmed the Pakistani government to make its national interests safe and protected. Pakistan became a sandwich while supporting the US policies against the Soviet Union. Pakistan joined US allies on the ground that the Soviet Union will attack her for reaching the hot water. From the last forty years war, launched in this region, among the two superpowers and war on terror, motivated extremism and fundamentalism in the region. The Pashtun society was targeted in every era and all the heinous extremism and terrorism took place in this region. On both sides of the border, only Pashtuns were targeted that led to extremism otherwise Pashtun would be peaceful.

The mujahedeen training camps were different in nature, and different specialized courses for Afghan fighters were organized by Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the USA. They were trained and provided short-course of ten days of using rocket, mortars and propelled grenades. Besides this, other programs were taught to train them on how to use car, bicycle, and camel, bombing in urban areas and how to assassinate high officials (Crile, 2003). The US administration provided billion dollars of expensive arms and ammunition through Pakistan government and ISI. However, Pakistan established a strict policy to keep away Americans from training camps (Coll, 2005).

According to Ahmad Rashid in "The Taliban Exporting Extremism," more than forty countries people participated in the Afghan war. Most of them came from Saudi Arabia trained in Pakistan for promoting Islamic extremism and radicalism. During the Soviet-Afghan war, more than one lac mujahedeen were trained and used against the Soviet Union (Carew, 2012). During 1983, the number of mujahedeen was forty-five thousand, but in 1985, the number abruptly increased to one lac. The increase in number was due to various financial packages of CIA for warfighters and motivation of them on the religious card by the Pakistan intelligence agencies (Grau, 2002).

### **Role of Saudi Arabia**

After the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, dramatic changes started in Pakistan, the US, and Saudi relations. Saudi and the United States have worked together on the same platform for Afghan cause. Under the US leadership, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan coordinated as teamwork to defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia and other Muslims states supported Afghan mujahedeen on the plea that we will not allow any non-Muslim state to control the reign of Muslim countries. All these countries declared the mujahedeen the real hero fighting for their independence from foreign rule. According to George Crile stated in his account "Charlie Wilson's

War" that Saudis were convinced that after Afghanistan Soviet Union will move towards Persian Gulf Oil and warm water. She was convinced that it is a good opportunity to stop them in Afghanistan and supported mujahedeen in 1979 (Crile, 2003. P.165). After the Saudi-US alliance, the CIA began to provide an advanced computer system to Saudi Arab General Intelligence Directorate (GID) and installed sensitive programs to intercept Moscow. To strengthen relations more with the Saudi government, Brzezinski visited Saudi Arab in the 1980s. Both the state make agreements for providing billions of dollars to support Afghan mujahedeen against the Soviet Union (Gates, 2006). Every year, head of General Intelligence Directorate (GID) Turki-al-Faisal sent billions of dollars to the Saudi Embassy in Washington, which further transformed into CIA account for purchasing arms for Afghan mujahedeen. General Intelligence Directorate (GID) works with the CIA and ISI while supplying a huge amount of dollars, arms, and mujahedeen to Pakistani training camps. A large number of religious mujahedeen were imported to Pakistan to fight jihad against Red armies.

Turki visited Pakistan to discuss the current crisis in Afghanistan and to achieve the confidence and support of the Pakistan government. Later on, the ISI chief, General Akhtar, visited Jeddah and met GID commander, Turki and chief of staff, Ahmed Badeb. Akhtar warned GID officials about direct interference in the Afghan war (Jones, 2006). Prince Fahad, the then newly crowned head of Saudi, also considered Pakistan, as the most reliable and strong supporter of Saudi Arabia in the East region. He ordered GID commander, to provide sufficient amount of finance to Pakistan in reward of the Afghan war. The GID commander, Turki sent Badeb along with \$1.8 million to mujahedeen through ISI, and Akhtar welcomed him at Karachi airport. Badeb delivered the message of the Saudi government to transfer a huge amount of dollars to Pakistan for arms and weapons support to mujahedeen. To provide logistical support to Afghan mujahedeen, ISI and GID constructed roads and buildings near the Pak-Afghan border. When Turki and Badeb visited Pakistan, the ISI briefed them, regarding the current situation and assistance to mujahedeen against Soviet armies. They were briefed through the maps provided by the CIA. The Saudi embassy in Pakistan played an important role during this period. It hosted Turki, Badeb, Islamic movement leaders, various diplomats, and Osama Bin Laden. The main aim of this gathering was to discuss all improvements and situations related to the Afghan war (Jones, 2006. P.156).

When the Afghan Jihad entered into a critical situation, Bin Laden used to meet the Saudi high officials on a regular basis including Turki and interior minister Naif. Both of these officials encouraged and appreciated Bin Laden's role in the Afghan jihad. Bin Laden had made close relations with the Saudi embassy in Pakistan during the Afghan war. During Soviet-Afghan war the GID chief stated about Osama Bin Laden that, "we are happy with him, he is our man. He is doing all that we need". The Saudi government and its intelligence motivated and encouraged people to take part in Afghan Jihad and used to say to the participants in the holy war that it is a golden opportunity for Muslims all over the world to play a role to protect a Muslim state.

## **Conclusion**

Form the above discussion the scholar narrated that the Afghan war and the so-called Jihad brought serious consequences for Pakistan in general and Pashtun society in particular. The in-depth roots of religious extremism change the mentality of our generation until today. The Pashtun population is still exercising the same episode which was performed forty years before. It is time for Pakistan, to change its policies from the war economy to sustainable development of economic system. The state should stop any kind of anti-Pashtun and proxies war in the Pashtun populated areas. It is time to redress the grievances of Pashtuns and work for the development of infrastructure, education, and health in the whole country in general and Pashtun populated areas in particular. It is the responsibility of the state to stop religious extremism in any form in society. Religious extremism and its use will not be in good faith for the future of the country. So we should stop religious extremism and should support and promote peace, love, and harmony in the country.

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