

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN PAKISTAN THROUGH PEACE EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF YOUTH IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is analyzing the role of peace education as a tool to counter violent extremism in Pakistan. Violent extremism has adverse effects on the economy that are substantial, impairing growth while lowering investment, tourism, and trade. It restricts education participation, especially for women and girls. Violent extremism can potentially escalate the conflict, destabilize nearby regions, and create ungoverned zones that permit the organized movement of people, goods, and guns. Violent extremism can limit the ability of aid organizations and donors to carry out their missions. States may shift funds from essential services to security in an effort to combat violent extremism, which can further alienate citizens and escalate bloodshed. It is evident that peace education is not a single entity it is a long-term answer in violent extremism prevention initiatives because it tackles the core causes of extremism and violence. The main goals of peace education are to combat cultural chauvinism and violence, support diversity, mediate conflicts and nuclear disarmament. The study revealed that both its methodology and its content are progressive and has the potential to counter violent extremism among youth.

Keywords: Violent Extremism, Peace education, Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Youth

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and bilingual country and is facing the severe issues of violent extremism since 1979. Particularly the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of the main victims of violent extremism that are affected from all strata of social classes and economic background equally. Consequently, the perpetrators of violent extremism have been successful in using the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for their own objectives. The current trend of increased violent extremism in youth has much to do with the extremist's narrative which is based on certain religious and political beliefs that shapes an individual's convictions and motivates him/her to become extremists and ultimately resort to violent activities.

Violent extremism is an outcome of polarized ideological attitudes and activities that lead to a sense of superiority over others (Sial, Safdar, and Tanveer Anjum, 2010). It also derives from a fight between official ideology and popular belief, socio-political-economic imbalances and significant in great power interests. It also results from conflicts between official ideology and popular belief, socio-political-economic inequalities, differences in the goals of big powers. Violent extremists are those individuals who employ violent means to achieve their political goals, weaken fundamental development objectives, and severely negatively impact on developing nations (Minhas, 2015).

Religious extremism is a particularly complicated and violent in nature that cuts class boundaries. It has to do with existential ideas about the character of religious laws and the possibility of receiving rewards in the afterlife (Ahmar, Moonis, 2011). People today are united by their shared religious, racial, and linguistic identities in a globalized globe. For instance, there is a global connection between sectarian violence in Pakistan and the Middle East and the Iran-Pakistan-Saudi Arabia scenario, founded on the Shia-Sunni identity. During the General Zia era, the rift between the two sects in Pakistan grew significantly impacting Pakistan's sectarian politics.

Political extremism does not manifest exclusively in overt action, but it also includes the upholding revolutionary extreme ideas. Therefore, political extremists are willing to do whatever it takes to fulfill their focal goal, even if the behavior at stake sacrifices things that matter. Their intense commitment to their dominant concern sets them apart from most people and accounts for their deviance from general behavioral norms. Political extremist groups and their parties are anti-democratic, anti-pluralistic, anti-constitutional, intolerant of differing viewpoints, fanatic orientation, authoritarian in outlook, single-minded, and strictly adhere to the philosophy that the end justifies the means—they want to achieve their goals by any means necessary, including political violence against opponents (Kemmesies, 2006). Extremist groups, whether from the political right or left, or those with a religious fundamentalist bent, prefer violence to conversation and persuasion, favour uniformity to diversity, unity to multiple ideas, and engage in physical violence. The radical rejects democracy and the rule of law outright. This has also left democracies in a quandary over whether or not to restrict such organizations, as extreme drastic action against such extremist groups runs the danger of them going underground and becoming terrorist organizations.

It is evident that peace education is not a single entity it is a long-term answer in violent extremism prevention initiatives because it tackles the core causes of extremism and violence. The main goals of peace education are to combat cultural chauvinism and violence, support diversity, mediate conflicts and

nuclear disarmament. It accomplishes this by instilling the key skills and motivating behavioral adjustments required to comprehend hrough instilling the key skills and motivating behavioral adjustments required to comprehend extremism's problems and essential extremism's problems, as well as generating alternative narratives based on tolerance and respect for all individuals, regardless of colour, ethnicity, country, gender, or religion. Peace education involves students and educators in a commitment to creating a more just and peaceful world (Harris, Ian M., and Mary, 2014). Almost every country in South Asia experiences some form of extremism. Pakistan has been particularly vulnerable to violent extremism, whether religious or political. The condition of divided communities in the region is a primary cause of violent extremism, mainly ethnic, religious, and sectarian extremism. South Asia is becoming more complex as the space for moderate voices in countries like Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan shrinks. In polarised groups, the spread of prejudice and hostility toward perceived outsiders thrives. By instilling tolerance and respect, peace education is a crucial tool for combating prejudice, animosity, and discrimination in such circumstances (Salomon, Gavriel, and Baruch Nevo, 2005). The main goal of peace education to change people's perceptions of the fundamental factors that lead to violent extremism—divisions based on race, religion, caste, class, and sect—especially among the next generation and transform the culture of extremism and violence into peaceful culture (Harris, Ian, 2010).

Literature Review

The prevalence of extremism has been rising throughout the world, and Pakistan is not an exception. For the past three to four decades, the nation has been plagued by extremism brought on by fanaticism from militant religious and ecclesiastical organizations. There are also reports based on surveys, controlled group studies and interviews conducted by many organizations regarding extremism and terrorism in FATA and Swat. Pew Foundation (PF), for instance, has conducted periodic studies of changing patterns of public opinion regarding militancy, state response, suicide bombing, Shariah and Taliban since 2002 as a

component of a global attitude survey. Some respondents the violent act to defend Islam from the enemies, while others rejected the violence in the name of Islam (Robert J, 2008). Khuram Iqbal, in his book based on the empirical study 'The Making of Pakistani Human Bomb', has given a comprehensive analysis of the Pakistani suicide bombing phenomenon. He studies and interprets the personal, demographic, and economic characteristics of Pakistani suicide bombers. He observes that using humans as bombs is perceived as effective vengeance, is sometimes promoted by rampant poverty in tribal areas and is fueled by religious fundamentalism. He explains that Pakistani youngest suicide bombers are the most dangerous in the world, the majority of whom target the civilian population (Khuram, 2015).

Muhammad Feyyaz has contributed to the academic analyses of multiple aspects of extremism and terrorism in Pakistan, highlighting the areas of FATA and Swat. His article titled "Political Economy of Tehrik-i-Taliban Swat", analyses the militant organizations' financial support of the militant organizations). The continuous financial stream ensures ongoing training, recruitment and terrorist attacks (Feyyaz, 2011). There is an element of predatory opportunism in how these organizations and their leaders manage money in organizations work. He urges that the prevailing situation warrants a fast-track strategy that would isolate monetary benefits from militancy and shadow economy devices providing oxygen to conflict entrepreneurs. Therefore, the government and political hierarchies must make deliberate politico-legal efforts to document the economy and broaden its base involving all segments of local communities aimed at discouraging predatory tendencies.

The impact of extremism and terrorism on the lives of affected areas was long-lasting. The global terrorism index ranks Pakistan every year in most affected countries as most affected countries with violence and extremism. The kind of terrorism experienced in ex-FATA and Swat was based on Hanafi School of Islamic thought, legitimizing she use of arms as Jihad on one hand and very dangerously promoting pan Islamism on the other. Naveen Nadia, in a report "Pakistan Education Crisis: The Real Story", expressed that in a country

like Pakistan, where the literacy rate is lower, the sectarian divide played an adverse role in the country's domestic politics. All over Pakistan, 77 percent per cent Sunni, 20 percent Shi'ah, and percent are non-Muslims. The Sunnis belong to the Hanfi Fiqah further divided into – the Deobandi and the Barelvi, then there is the Wahhabi school by Ahl-e-Hadith. This religion ethnic divide further polarizes Pakistani society. Naveen linked illiteracy with the phenomenon of extremism/terrorism; hence, she just explored a particular variable (illiteracy) in the context of extremism and terrorism (Nadia, 2016).

Methodology

The study adopts the qualitative research approach and employs thematic analysis to examine peace education as a tool to counter violent extremism in youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In doing so, it investigates the leading drivers of extremism and the role of peace education in countering extremism in youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. To achieve the study objectives, in-depth information will be acquired from the available scholarly literature and primary data collection. The qualitative approach was thus the most suitable for this kind of research. A convenience sampling technique, has been used to select the study respondents for data collection. Convenience sampling is non-probability sampling that aims getting data from the participants who are easily accessible to the researcher (Etikan, Ilker, Sulaiman Abubakar Musa, and Rukayya, 2016). Secondary data has been collected from scholarly published research articles, journals, news reports, Open-ended interviews have collected primary data from experts (peace scholars, peace activists, and policymakers). The study's findings have been drawn based on data collected through both sources—It is important to note that the scholarly published literature from 2000 -2022 has been consulted for secondary data collection.

Analysis and Discussions

The social fabric of Pakistan's society has been severely disrupted by its alliance with the US in the War on Terror. The security situation in Pakistan has been severely impacted by the emergence of terrorism since 9/11. Pakistan has seen significant

losses in terms of lives, opportunities for economic growth, and infrastructure destruction. More than 81,000 lives have been lost as a result. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan, the direct and indirect costs of terrorism in Pakistan over the previous 14 years was US\$106.98 billion. However, due in part to military operations in tribal areas and the Karachi operation, the annual losses from terrorism decreased by a third to US\$4.5 billion in 2014–15. In addition, Pakistan has paid for damages to hospitals, schools, and other infrastructure as a result of its relationship.

Peace education is a long-term and sustainable approach to counter violent extremism and is efforts to resolve and prevent conflict because it deals with the underlying causes of conflict. This is accomplished by fostering the critical thinking abilities and behavioral shifts necessary to comprehend the difficulties posed by violence and conflict, as well as by creating counternarratives based on acceptance and respect for all individuals, regardless of their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or religion. The goals peace education includes developing in students a commitment to nonviolence and educating them on nonviolent conflict resolution techniques so that they will opt for peaceful behavior when faced with conflict. This is one method that peace education aims to cultivate peace in students' minds (Salomon, Gavriel, and Baruch Nevo, 2005). Galtung¹ is one of the pioneering scholars of peace education. He gave a fundamental concept of peace and played its role in removing the negative components associated with peace education. It has linked peace education with other major areas of study such as human rights studies, development studies, and disarmament studies, thus expanding the scope of peace education (Galtung, 1998).

UNESCO provides a comprehensive framework for bringing a culture of world peace through a holistic education that includes administrators and educational partners and also insists on greater autonomy and continuing education implemented around the world, with all the necessary resources. The content should additionally include citizenship

education that enables individuals to engage in conflict resolution strategies, democracy, human rights, elimination of discriminatory behavior based on ethnicity, racism, religion, and sexism. The framework indicates that the aim of peace education is the development of every person in this universal sense of value and the achievement of certain behaviors that envision a culture of peace in different socio-cultural contexts by identifying and respecting human rights and achieving democratic behavior (UNESCO, 2010).

Many forms of peace education perspectives are drawn from some of the basic principles of peace theory. Parts of this theory state that there are three (general) ways to achieve peace: peacekeeping, peace-making and peace-building. Peacekeeping can be seen as 'peace by strength', peace-making can be the application of conflict resolution techniques so that the warring parties can resolve their differences after fighting has stopped, and peace-building looks at longer term goals, such as attitudinal adjustment and developing understanding of perspectives. It is apparent that peace education must be a part of peace-building as both short- and long-term goals are considered to be sought via the educational process. In this approach, as well as being a part of peace-building, peace education can then be viewed as a distinct part of conflict transformation. This is an aspect that will be reflected upon when analysing the practices of the organisations within the case illustrations (Slade, Steven, 2013).

Peace education has changed from its original focus on understanding the causes of war and how to prevent it to studying violence in all of its forms and educating people on how to combat the war system in order to build a system of peace on both a structural and personal level. Peace education promotes egalitarian learning environments, open inquiry, and substantial student participation. Both its methodology and its content are progressive. David Hicks, Ian Harris, and Betty Reardon are three peace educators who believe in the potential of education to change society. These educators hope to pave the way for a peaceful future by raising

¹ Galtung, Johan. *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Vol. 14. Sage, 1996.

awareness of the connections between systemic violence and direct violence. It has never been more important to comprehend peace education and to support it. Despite the fact that the world is currently in some degree of crisis, it should be remembered that this crisis has its roots in a long history of structural violence within a global culture of war. Peace educators have known for a long time that the public's support for peace education results from awareness of the crises in the economy, society, and the environment. (Terrance, 1998) Even though some theorists have framed this perceived crisis as the triumph of capitalism and individual liberty over socialism and equality, it appears more likely that more immediate challenges to national and economic security are to blame for the popular feeling of crisis. In any case, the importance of peace education stems not just from its viewpoint on sudden outbreaks of violence like war, terrorism, abuse, etc., but also from its efforts to confront persistent and long-standing dangers to human security (Ardizzone, Leonisa, 2001).

In addition to making Freire's pedagogy truly liberating and transformative, his recognition that society is dynamic rather than static also lends more credence to the practise of peace education in the age of globalization. This and other Freirean ideas about the need for education to create an awareness and comprehension of causal relationships, so widening one's worldview, have been reaffirmed by peace education theorists like Magnus Haavelsrud. Learners are able to recognise contradictions in the social, political, and economic domains by comprehending the links between micro and macro (also known as local and global). Learners experience a deep transformation through this initial awareness and subsequent knowledge, which is characterised by an expanded worldview and a greater understanding of the connection of all living things on the globe.

Majority of the respondent agreed the methodology of peace education is calm and comprehensive philosophy that is based on a tranquil environment. Every member of the community can learn the rules and procedures for countering extremism. Achieving individual, group, and institutional goals as well as creating a cooperative environment that fosters the growth of cooperative relationships are all objectives

of peace education. A programme that promotes peace in the classroom instills conflict-resolution techniques among students, between teachers and students, between supervisors and teachers, and between parents and school staff. For a student to acquire an effective attitude towards conflict resolution, the teacher and student must share a connection of mutual faith and thankfulness. In a calm classroom, the biggest problem for educators is maintaining continual contact with every student. Adult relationships can fall under the same concept. It focuses a strong emphasis on a holistic and diversified method to get above linguistic, cultural, and regressive barriers and promote a modern, pluralist, democratic Pakhtun society. The fundamental idea is to engage individual in cultural interchange and social interaction with indigenous cultural institutions while urging them to set aside morbid fantasies and focus on practical skills.

Conclusion

To effectively address the challenges posed by violent extremism, encompassing political instability, economic downturns, and educational deficiencies, the time has come for resolute action aimed at instigating transformative changes in the political, economic, and educational spheres. Countering violent extremism involves crafting policies and implementing tangible measures that curtail activities and beliefs conducive to violence and terrorism. Peace education helpful in the development of information, skills and mindset of individuals that help them to create behavior and attitude that is necessary for peaceful living in the society. Given that it addresses the root causes of violent extremism and is a long-term solution in endeavors to prevent counter violent extremism. Combating cultural prejudice, chauvinism¹² and violence, promoting peacebuilding, diversity, mediating disputes, are the core objectives of peace education. This is done through establishing the necessary knowledge and encouraging behavioral changes necessary to appreciate the issues with extremism, as well as by creating alternative narratives based on acceptance and respect for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, country, gender, or religion. Students and educators who practice peace education pledge to working towards

a more just and peaceful world . Almost all of South Asia's nations struggle with some sort of extremism. Pakistan has a history of being particularly susceptible to extremism, whether it is political or religious. Extremism, particularly racial, religious, and sectarian extremism, is mostly caused by the region's divisive communities. As there is less room for moderate voices in nations like Pakistan. The primary objective of peace education to alter people's perceptions of the fundamental elements—divisions based on race, religion, caste, class, and sect—that give rise to extremism, especially among the youth.

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