Pakistan's Struggle against Extremist Onslaught, Assimilating Women in Pakistan's Counter-Extremism Efforts; A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract

Radicalization and wide spread extremist ideologies culminating in organized acts of terrorism have become a great challenge for the contemporary modern world. The threat becomes more severe in the context of developing and underdeveloped societies where state infrastructure is in nascent stages and hence, cannot face such complex and daunting threats. The penetration and expansion of the radical ideas by the use of modern tools of information technology and innovative means of communication facilitate the radical outfits which have serious ramifications for all sections of society but youth being receptive to emotional and adventurous ideologies and slogans of change are most vulnerable. In case of Pakistan, where terrorism in the name of religion has become the most terrifying phenomena incurring heavy losses on the country's weak economy, the youth of Pakistan need to be educated, enlightened and equipped intellectually and conceptually against the extremist milieu. The task is gigantic and involves comprehensive de-radicalization and counters radicalization programs and in case of Pakistan's meager resources allocated for education the task is a far cry. In this connection the role of women needs to be focused and utilized given the Pakistan's specific socio-cultural context wherein the role of mother is like that of a nucleus. The present study aims to focus on the importance of the role of women in inculcating counter radicalization attitudes and ideas in the young generations and will explore possible suggestions to enhance role of women in CVEs efforts at various levels in the society.

Keywords: Extremism, Counter-Extremism, Women, Pakistan

Introduction

The terms radicalization and radicalism are frequently used interchangeably in the relevant literature and research but both these terms lack clarity and a consensual definition. The literature on radicalization is full of disagreement, confusions, vagueness and lack of a strict frame of understanding (Brussels, Nov 2007).
It is thus, pertinent to differentiate between radicalism and radicalization in the beginning to avoid conceptual confusion. The former refers to a legitimate political cause and many political parties in Europe adhere to it and are reflected in their titles. It is taken as a commitment to introduce sweeping changes by restructuring political and social institutions. Thus, radicalism as an ideology challenges the status-quo and establishment of norms and policies but it does not, in itself, lead to violence ("Radicalization Process leading to Acts of Terrorism," May 15, 2008). While the

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latter, i.e. radicalization is considered to be associated with peculiar kind of socialization that leads to extremism (Orav, March 2015).

It is however, worth mentioning that "there is no singular, official, and government-wide understanding of radicalization" and that the term is a social construction and is hence contested widely when attempts are made to offer a universally acceptable definition (Akbar, 2013).

The term has, as is becoming a general perception in the context of growing terrorism in the name of Islam, no exclusive co-relation or special connection with Islam or Muslims, rather it was applied in the early 1900s in the US to the protestant revival movement and later on to similar movements within Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism (Koopmans, 2014). And it "may occur within any way of life and religion (Sailoke, 2003). Terrorists are a product of a complex process and that process is "radicalization". Thus, the growing menace of terrorism in Muslim communities and societies also entails the necessary precursor process of radicalization and is hence generally associated with Islam and Muslims. The term is defined by a famous expert on terrorism Brian Jenkins as "the process of adopting for oneself or inculcate in others as commitments not only to a system of radical beliefs, but to their imposition on the rest of society" (Grosman, 2009).

The process embodies "adoption" which means it must have a beginning and requires a supporting environment with push and pull factors. Horgan (2009) defines the term as "the social and psychological process of increasing commitment to extremist political or religious ideology" (Horgan, 2009, p. 29).

Although, radicalization and extremism are often used interchangeably but the term radicalization is always used to encompass a process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs. Perversion of this leads to violent radicalization, a term coined after the Madrid bombings of March 11, 2004 in European Union policy circles. Though not widely used in Social Sciences as a concept, the term refers to socialization process as a precursor to use of violence. Violent radicalization is embracing of opinions, views, ideas and thoughts that lead to acts of terrorism and violence ("Terrorist recruitment: Addressing the factors contributing to Violent Radicalization," 2005).

Radicalization and radicalized people do not necessarily lead to involvement in terrorist activities rather a small group of activist function as operatives which are facilitated by an environment characterized by a "radical milieu". In his conceptualization of the trajectory of radicalization toward the use or endorsement of terrorism, McCauley's pyramid model positions terrorists as the apex of a pyramid composed of a general population, passive supporters, and active supporters. In this model, terrorists are but a very small fraction of the overall collective that the broader pyramid is meant to represent (McCauley, 2009).

The concept of Radical milieu posits that radicalization is the "result of political and social processes that involve a collectivity of people beyond the terrorist group itself and cannot be understood in isolation. Even if their violent campaign necessitates clandestine forms of operation, most terrorist groups remain connected and active in a

"radical milieu" to recruit new members because they depend on shelter and assistance given by this supportive milieu without which they are unable to evade persecution and carry out violent attacks" (Malthaner, 2014).

The reasons for prevalence and existence of such an environment where violent radicals can find support, sympathies, and facilitators is a result of various factors ranging from "negative social, cultural, and political features of one's societal environment that aid in pushing vulnerable individuals onto the path of violent extremism. Push factors are what are commonly known as 'underlying/root causes' such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination and economic marginalization" (Hasan, 2012). But the process of radicalization is gradual and comprises of many complex steps and hence, "there is no one path, no "trajectory profile" to political radicalization. Rather, there are many different paths.. some of these paths do not include radical ideas or activism on the way to radical action, so the radicalization progression cannot be understood as an invariable set of steps or stages from sympathy to radicalism" (Moskalenko, 2010).

Since Pakistan has been facing the menace of terrorism and extremism coupled with a dwindling economy, unemployment, neglected education and health sectors and mushroom growth of fervent, fanatic religious and sectarian factions, the atmosphere hence, provides a "radical milieu" that may result in making the youth as a target for radicalization and recruitment for radical violent acts. The current modern approaches towards security focus on the role of women in promoting peace. Mothers and Wives are considered agents of peace and early warning systems (D'Estaing, 2017). But the strategies and methods of including women as agents and promoters of peace are not very much clear and hence each socio-cultural setting has to device its own peculiar methods and strategies of including the women in peace efforts. The process can be complimented by taking into account various strategies employed in different settings across the globe sine the threat of violent religious extremism is a global challenge. The paper hence explores the prospects of taking women on board in Pakistan's fight against violent religious extremism.

Literature Review

Literature on radicalization, extremism, counter extremism, and role of women in counter extremist measures is sufficient but the literature on the later three processes outweighs the literature on role of women. Randy Borum has discussed in detail the concept of radicalization and its transformation into violent radicalization and terrorism. He has elaborated the confusions and complexities that surround this term and tries to build a sound understanding of the phenomenon by relying on various Social Science theories (Borum, 2011). In this scholarly work Borum analyzes the discourse on radicalization and the related vagueness in explanations. According to him, radicalization does not necessarily lead to terrorism and violence and it is not necessary for a terrorist to be a radical. In other words, terrorism is not merely another

advance stage of radicalization. Terrorism on the contrary depends on a number of factors which vary from case to case depending upon the context and location. The article in this connection analyzes some prominent theories that are helpful in understanding the radicalization process like social movement theory, social psychology and conversion theory. The author makes a difference between radicalization and terrorism, the former as a "process" and the latter as "action path ways". In a European context this explanation might be true but in societies where religion has been used as a tool for attracting people and it has been a historical tradition of tyrants, dictators, autocrats and foreign elements, the distinction between terrorist and religious fanatics and radicalized people needs to be cautiously dealt.

The process of radicalization is not an abrupt one and has various stages and steps which have been studied, analyzed and discussed thoroughly by various scholars, government agencies and policy makers so as to formulate preventive measures accordingly. Various models of radicalization process have been offered by scholars of which the prevent pyramid model is one. The Audit Commission (2008) Report of U.K to the Home Department titled "Preventing Violent Extremism: Learning and Development Exercise, Report to the Home Office and Communities and Local Government" sheds light on this model ("Preventing Violent Extremism: Learning and Development Exercise, Report to the Home Office and Communities and Local Government," 2008). This model divides society into four segments in a pyramid, each segment representing a segment of society. The lowest represents the whole, i.e. the whole community, the second represents those who are likely to fall a prey to radicalization, the vulnerable segment, the third represents those who actually start becoming radicalized, and the fourth when some of those, very few, began to break laws. The civil society responds accordingly by adopting a a) universal approach, b) targeted approach, c) interventionist approach, and d) an enforcement approach. The study hence, lays emphasis on response approaches and strategies and is concerned only with appropriate response measures from the context towards an individual who is being radicalized. It does not take into account psychological factors. In studies of radicalization, Dr. Arie W. Kruglansk and Mr. David Webber have presented the psychological dimension of radicalization. They have elaborated, in a theoretical model approach, the psychological factors in process of radicalization. They believe that an individual's thoughts, during the process of radicalization, acquire an extreme position inconsistent with the prevailing social values. Therefore, radicalization is understood as an extreme commitment towards itemized trade off goal ascertained by an individual. The model presented signifies three important constituent elements among others that lead an individual to an extreme level of commitment. The first component in motivation is the identification of a specific goal towards which the individual is dedicated. The individual's pursuit and understanding of goal is significant in this case. The second component is relevant to cultural motivation and its ideological support that makes rationalize violent means in pursuit of conceived goal. Last component of radical motivation is social dynamic that defines the ideology of a specific group and their appropriation with reference to the surrounding

environment. The ideological basis derived and supported from a specific environment makes a head way in rationalization and consequently adopting violence for attainment of specific goals. They further argue that an ideology emanating from grievances among a collective portion of population easily identifies violence and terrorism, most easy ways to achieve the target aimed at addressing the defined grievances.

Another study carried out by an independent research Centre based in Britain has published the paper titled "A Decade Lost: Rethinking Radicalization and Extremism" focused on official narrative on the causes of terrorism in United Kingdom. It has also traced the origins of the present official narrative and indicated presence of extremist ideas as root cause of terrorism in their country. The official narrative discussed therein stresses the government to play its role to root out extremist ideas and it appeals its people to adhere their allegiance towards British values. It is further mentioned that the extremist ideas are totally in opposition to the long held British values and it is the responsibility of government to intervene timely bringing back the indigenous values on surface in the society. Moreover, promotion of this narrative has only been noticed at political fronts; the ministers in government, while, a scholarly investigation regarding the causes of terrorism has been very thin as yet, and growing academic search termed the struggle as basically flawed attempt. Policies carved out of prevailing official narrative has been termed partial and fruitless for that the causes of terrorism indicated were not associated with the violence spread over the last decade. The paper proceeds further mentioning the factors are more complex than the values oriented appraisal and it signifies development of new policies to avert risk of violent terrorist activities and recommends to restrict individuals suspected of financing and aggravating terrorism. The paper ends with the arguing that there should be spacious argumentation by all to cut the nurturing of radical ideas in coming generations mostly from aggrieved citizens.

Raheem Ul Haque, a Pakistani student based in Lahore, worked out a paper titled "Youth radicalization in Pakistan" published in United States Institute of Peace (USIP) aimed at understanding the process of radicalization of youth in Pakistan (Haque, Feb 26, 2014). He attributes the rise in extremism with reference to radical ideas promoted in the country through militant organizations mostly originating from radical Islamic ideologies gradually attracting and converting youth and gathering public support by applying various propaganda methods. He comes up with the conclusion that the youth in Pakistan constitutes thirty per cent of overall population and their socialization would have sweeping implications for the country in coming two to three decades. For that, he argues, apart from role played by the police and other security agencies, educational institutes, media and civil society needs to play a vibrant and proactive role.

A study report published by the Minaret of Freedom Institute titled "Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism in Western Muslim Communities: Lessons Learned for America" has prudently outlined the course of "homegrown" radicalization

particularly in United States of America (Beutel, August 30, 2007). This report provides a lesson regarding the reasons why Muslims in USA adhere to radicalization and how some of them join such organization and support acts of terrorism. It is indicated in the first section that the socio-economic and political discontent in individuals inflicts cognition with a sense of disparity and it is coupled with heterogeneity in religion and its search for identification with regards to specific religious identity. It is further argued that during the process of socialization of self-identity and knowledge of one's religion with varying degrees play vital role. Thus, an individual starts with being a member and steps further towards commitment while, internalized ideology is strengthened by group members sharing similar views facilitated even through mass media. The second section of paper criticizes the term "homegrown" terrorism and rebuts with logical argument that the domestic terrorists do not function in isolation rather they have identical connection with regards to ideology and even militant cooperation with somewhere else centralized systems or groups. Therefore, motivation is transfused into American society from other national or transnational systems. Lastly, this paper concludes with a number of policy suggestion to government particularly and Muslim communities generally. It urges for formulation of strategies aimed at prevention of radicalization through development of strong collaboration amongst private and public sectors. Law enforcement agencies require developing confidence with Muslim communities and the Muslims reciprocate by averting the radical ideas seducing their youth. As for as role of the women in efforts of peace is concerned Naqvi and Riaz (2015) have studied the prospects of including women in peacebuilding efforts. She has provided an apt theoretical foundation drawing from the U.N resolutions on inclusion of women in peace building efforts. She concludes that inclusion of women in conflict resolution process would help resolving the issues of not only peace and conflict but would guarantee the representation and protection of their rights. Likewise, Mirahmadi and Ziad (2012) also shed light on the genesis and role of women in the civil society of Pakistan. According to the writers women in Pakistan have a strong position in the civil society but unfortunately their role in conflict resolution processes is negligible. In a similar effort of highlighting the role of women done by d'Estaing (2017) posit that women hold a very important role in the future of countering violent extremism and excluding women from community based de-radicalization efforts is counterintuitive.

 A well-researched lengthy report of European Parliament (European Parliament, 2017) deals with the issue of radicalized women and also takes into account various measures and strategies to harness the potential of the women in the De-radicalization and counter-extremism measures. The study focuses on analyzing women-specific vulnerabilities, pointing out women-specific enabling factors, bringing forth female specific issues in intervention and reintegration programming, spreading information and awareness about the women's enhanced role in the age on internet and social media.

U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism has shed light on how the issue

of women was long neglected in the international politics and decisions and how at present the focus on the role of women has gained impetus. The role of U.N and various other global organizations and agencies in bringing forth the issue is elaborated and the author foresees an enhanced role of women in counter violent extremist initiatives. This is because, according to the author "states now understand that enforcement requires dealing with the issues of inequality and autonomy, and ensuring the meaningful participation of women in the making of peace and security policy". The insight is useful in understanding the issue of "gender" and "equality" at global level and how it has affected the discourse on counter violent extremism approaches (Aoláin, 2015).

Globally, women as mothers and wives possess the ability to inspire positive change within families and in their communities. But the literature on women's role is not very much clear about the strategies and methods to be applied to take women on board in the efforts of countering violent extremism and radicalization and also the methods and observations are relative and every society in its own specific settings has to devise such strategies.

Situating women in counter violent extremism in Pakistan

Pakistan is a country that has been at the fore front of global war on terror initiated by the U.S approved and supported by its allies. The country was ruled by a military regime when the United States declared this global venture and asked for Pakistan to play its role in dismantling global terrorist networks. Due to its role in the cold war, where the state supported United States' efforts in settling the scores with the former Soviet Union as is very much clear in the statement of Zbigniew Brzezinski, where he confesses that the tacit support to the Mujahedeen trained and provided by Pakistan was a part of bigger cold war rivalry where U.S saw an opportunity of "giving to the USSR its Vietnam war" (Gibbs, 2000). The country's drift into violent religious extremism is deeply rooted in that episode of cold war. Religious groups got encouraged and the mushroom growth of religious seminaries became a hall mark of the society that supported a "radical milieu" where in violent religious extremist groups began to organize and later on started challenging the writ of the state and calling such acts a holy war. The threat of violent religious extremism became so much prominent that the current military chief in Pakistan considers it as a bigger threat than India which is generally considered as the only major threat among traditional/veteran security analysts (Dawn, Nov 26, 2016).

Since the tragic events of 9/11 Pakistan has faced huge man and material losses amounting to a staggering $123 billion from the year 2000 to 2017 (Yaseen & Awan, 2017).

Table 1
Loss of Pakistan in war against terrorism

Year	Civilians	Security Force Personnel	Terrorists/Insurgents	Total
2003	140	24	25	189
2004	435	184	244	863
2005	430	81	137	648
2006	608	325	538	1471
2007	1522	597	1479	3598
2008	2155	654	3906	6715
2009	2324	991	8389	11704
2010	1796	469	5170	7435
2011	2738	765	2800	6303
2012	3007	732	2472	6211
2013	3001	676	1702	5379
2014	1781	533	3182	5496
2015	940	339	2403	3682
2016	308	151	623	1082
Total	**21185**	**6521**	**33070**	**60776**

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal

In the year 2016 alone 600 innocent people were killed in various terrorist attacks across the country. The figure of casualties is considered as low as compared to the situation in 2013 and 2014 when terrorist acts killed more than 3,000 civilians each year. The following list of violent religious extremism incidents in the somewhat peaceful year of 2016 in Pakistan clearly gives a hint towards the severity of the threat in destabilizing the country.

> ➢ On March 27, a suicide bomber killed at least 74 people at Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park in Lahore. JuA (Jamaat-ul-Ahrar) claimed responsibility for the attack.

- ➢ On August 8, a bomb killed at least 70 people at a hospital in Quetta where lawyers had gathered to mourn the assassination of a prominent lawyer. JuA and ISIS-K separately claimed responsibility for the attack.
- ➢ On September 16, a suicide bomber killed at least 36 people at a mosque during Friday prayers in the Mohmand Tribal District. JuA claimed responsibility for the attack.
- ➢ On October 24, three militants stormed a police training center in Quetta and killed at least 60 people with gunfire and suicide vests. A LeJ affiliate and ISIS-K claimed responsibility for the attack.
- ➢ On November 12, a suicide bomber killed more than 50 people at the shrine of Sufi saint Shah Bilal Noorani in Balochistan. A LeJ affiliate and ISIS-K claimed responsibility for the attack" (U.S Country Reports, 2016).

The country has responded with an array of responses and measures. Legislation has been done at various occasions to counter the onslaught of religious extremist factions. The establishment of anti-terrorism courts, the consensual agreement on the National Action Plan, the introduction of National Counter terrorism Act (NACTA), National Internal Security Policy 2014 (NISP), and the creation of military courts for the speedy and undeterred trial of high profile terrorist activists are some of the measures the state has taken as its response towards the growing menace of violent religious extremism.

These measures have yielded mixed results and a lot more is expected from Pakistan to undertake in its difficult journey of countering violent religious extremism. The critics of the much hailed National Action Plan have raised many points of disagreement and objected to the overall efficacy and relevance of the document. "The haphazardly framed 20-point NAP agenda lacks proper direction, as well as coordination between the federal and provincial governments. It also appears to lack the full backing of the powerful military establishment" (Zahid, 2016). Both the supporters and critics of Pakistan's counter extremism and terrorism measures totally ignore the absence of any role given to the women. The 20 point National Action Plan has not a single point about women and their role and the critics of the plan equally ignore this aspect. Contrary to this oblivious attitude towards the role of women in Counter extremist policies and measures, women across the world have been playing their role in an effective way. In this regard the model "Mother Schools" serve as an apt example of involving women in counter extremist strategies. The project is Austria based and is the brain child of global women

rights agency, 'women without borders' (WWB) and acts at a very gross root level. It in a very effective way empowers the women by taking them on board in de-radicalizing their families and for that task they are properly educated and trained. "The curriculum, implemented through trusted community partners, includes specific exercises that facilitate dialogue, exchange information and use critical reflection through context-based techniques that apply to participants' daily lives. This model creates a formalized space for mothers to improve their knowledge of early-warning signs and strategies how to be effective barriers to radical influences. Together they can deconstruct social barriers and have open dialogue about their children's struggles, as well as their own… Mothers are provided with specific instruction on recognizing and reacting to the early warning signs of radicalization, including instruction on the role the Internet plays in spreading extremist messages, as well as how to engage fathers in looking out for, and addressing concerning behavior" (Schlaffer & Kropiunigg, 2015).

The role of women as mothers in preventing violent extremism and radicalization cannot be over exaggerated and evidence from various studies suggest that mothers in a family serve as early alarms, being close to the child from the early stages she becomes the better person to notice behavioral and attitudinal changes in the later stages of adulthood.

Another major study also supports the effective role of mothers in countering violent extremism and based on extensive study and data analysis the study reveals two things, "The first is that mothers are confident in their own security potential if equipped with the right tools and knowledge. Second, their awareness of their needs indicates they are already confronting radical influences and feel as if they are responding less than effectively (CENTCOM, 2016; Schlaffer & Kropiunigg, 2017).

Moreover, the role of women in Counter violent extremist strategies in the context of providing intelligence support and helping security agents is also recognized (Calfas, 2016).

It is thus an established fact that violent extremism can be countered through qulity education, encouraging critical thinking and enhanced opportunities for women. The correlation between women empowerment and reduction in violent extremism and an increase in violent extremism with increasing gender discrimination is also a fact that is supported by various surveys and research reports (Couture, 2014).

In the light of the through survey of literature and the nature and dynamics of Pakistan's fight against violent religious extremism the following suggestions are listed.

Suggestions and recommendations

1. Counter violent extremism responses should be context based and focus should be on how gender plays a role in the process.
2. Localization of counter violent extremism strategies should be encouraged wherein local leadership should be allowed to take decisions and that should be gender balanced approach.
3. Programs should emphasize prevention versus prosecution and should incorporate gender analyses.
4. Women capacity building aimed at enhancing their safe and productive contribution tailored according to the local contexts.
5. A clear and vigorous policy for the safety and security of the women involved in counter violent extremist strategies should be devised again keeping in mind the local context and requirements. There should be zero tolerance when it comes to protection of women helping the counter violent extremist strategies and policies
6. Legitimacy of counter violent extremism programs is a big challenge and local people often see externally driven, foreign funded initiatives with suspicion and discourage cooperation with such agencies. Such programs should be initiated from the grass root level and guidance should be taken from local women. This will evade the possibility of such programs being labelled as foreign funded or imposed from above making it safe for women to participate in such programs.
7. Formal and informal education can be used as an effective tool in the process of inculcating values that will promote tolerance, peace, and the concept of peaceful coexistence with diverse ethnic and religious communities. Pakistan being a multi religious and multi ethnic country requires such strategies. The focus on women and young girls in this context can be very effective and productive.
8. Discussions with women organizations, engaging common women, and taking college and university female students on board in devising strategies for counter violent extremism should be prioritized. The input will serve as a genuine road map and a precious pool of guidance in countering violent religious extremism.
9. Participation and representation of women in security agencies especially those agencies that are concerned with countering violent religious extremism should be ensured. Seeking women input in devising strategies for countering violent religious extremism will

provide a comprehensive account of the on-ground situation and will help in taking into account an array of drivers of violent religious extremism which would otherwise are generally ignored.

10. A strategy to evaluate and assess the experience of women involved in counter violent religious extremist programs should be devised focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of such programs. It should be made mandatory to integrate women in all national and local plans of action for eradicating extremism.

11. The government should Integrate a gender dimension in all Counter Terrorism and Counter Violet Extremism work, including ensuring a gender dimension is incorporated into assessments, considering the impact of CVE programming on women and girls from design to implementation and evaluation

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