

## **Towards the De-radicalization of Pakistani Society: The Need for a Balanced and Progressive Education System**

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### **Abstract**

The spread of violent extremism, known as radicalization, is one of the major challenges that the state of Pakistan is confronted with. Thousands of people, including women and children, have lost their lives either in the hands of terrorists or in the global war on terror, waged by a number of countries. The major focus of researchers, both in the West and the rest, is on finding out ways and means to arrest radical tendencies in the Muslim world, disengage the extremists from terrorist outfits and help Muslim countries initiate programmes for de-radicalization of their societies. A lot of investment has been done by all important western capitals, USA, NGOs and some developing countries as well to conduct research on various aspects of radicalization and spread of religious extremism in Muslim countries, including Pakistan.

There are a number of factors which are responsible for the spread of extremism and radicalism in Pakistani society. An unbalanced education system is one of them. The role of education in the development of the outlooks and behaviors of citizens in any society needs no emphasis. A cohesive, purposeful and well planned / organized education system produces a responsible citizenry, whereas, a divisive, ineffective and disjointed education system produces confused and directionless citizenry.

This research examines the dilemma of education in Pakistan and its role in preventing the spread of extremism of various kinds in our society. The objective of this paper is to draw the attention of researchers and policy makers towards a major cause for diffusion of intolerance, extremism, despondency and criminality in the society i.e. the lack of provision for an efficient and adequate education for the citizens of Pakistan. The gist of the study is that prevailing education system of Pakistanis is 'divisive in nature'. It has many streams without any common guiding principles. Barring the elite educational institutions, most of the public sector as well as private sector educational institutions lack the infrastructure, programmes and educational wherewithal to provide sound education, balanced outlook and adequate skills to their graduates. This, in turn, results in unemployment, spread of extremism and criminality in the society. Therefore, any effort to

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address the issue of radicalization in society is unlikely to achieve significant results, unless a cohesive education system, with a broad consensus on principles, goals and objectives, is developed. The focus of such an education system should be on the provision of sufficient technical skills for the employment of youth and sound citizens' skills to make them future responsible citizens, both at home and abroad.

**Keywords:** Islamization; Radicalization; Balanced-education; Tolerance; Citizens' skills.

### **Introduction**

The spread of violent extremism; a phenomenon known in modern Western terminology as 'radicalization', has become one of the major challenges that the state of Pakistan is confronted with. No one can deny the phenomenal growth of intolerance, religious fanaticism and extremism in Pakistan, particularly that which has taken place in last three decades. We may choose to give it any name: Extremism, Terrorism or Radicalization, but the reality is that this phenomenon manifests itself in many forms and shapes. Thousands of innocent people, including women and children, have lost their lives in the hands of terrorists and yet more thousands have been incapacitated and maimed. Despite twelve years of global war on terror, fought with enormous resources and military might, no respite from this menace seems in sight for foreseeable future. While the use of surgical instruments, to address a malignant malady in the short term, cannot be ruled out, prudence demands that the efforts should be directed, in the long term, towards finding out the real causes of the disease and its effective treatment.

The major focus of researchers in the post 9/11 period, both in the West and the rest, has been on finding out the ways and means to arrest radical tendencies in the Muslim world, disengage the extremists from terrorist outfits and help Muslim countries initiate the programmes for de-radicalization of their societies.<sup>1</sup> A great deal of investment has been made by all the important Western capitals, the USA, NGOs and some developing countries to conduct research on various aspects of radicalization and the spread of religious extremism in Muslim countries, including Pakistan. But the focus of most of these activities has been on the mitigation of current escalation of terrorism in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Radicalization in Pakistani society did not take place over night. There are undoubtedly a number of factors which are responsible for the spread of extremism and radicalism in our society. It may be too simplistic to isolate a single factor, which was predominantly the cause of such a phenomenon known as 'radicalization'. But, nevertheless, if one has to identify the primary factor, which has directly or indirectly contributed towards the promotion of an intolerant and unbalanced society in Pakistan, this is, in view of this researcher, the prevailing education system of Pakistan. The role of education in the development of the outlooks and behaviors of citizens in any society needs no emphasis. A cohesive, purposeful and well organized education system produces a responsible citizenry, whereas, a divisive, inefficient and disjointed education system produces a confused and directionless citizenry.

The present study was conducted to investigate whether Pakistan has been able to develop a balanced and uniform education system, which can provide its citizens with sufficient skills to live a responsible life. It is assumed that violent and intolerant behaviors of citizens are byproducts of societal inefficiencies and inadequacies. The lack of provision of a balanced education to the citizens is one of those inefficiencies, which also results in radicalization. The prevailing education system of Pakistan, with so many streams and without any common guiding principles and effective regulatory mechanism, is not only divisive in nature but also ineffective. The purpose of the paper is to draw the attention of the researchers and policy makers towards a major reason of diffusion of intolerance, extremism, despondency and criminality in the society i.e. the lack of provision of efficient and adequate education to the citizens of Pakistan.

### **Education and Radicalization – The Nexus**

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping the outlooks and behavior of individuals. Training in citizenship is, therefore, the essential purpose of all education. It would generally imply 'the inculcation of that sense of social and political responsibility which enables a people to function smoothly and profitably as a political unit. It tries to root out anti-social tendencies and to create habits, instincts, pattern of behaviors and norms of conduct which eliminate anti-social and selfish tendencies. In countries with no traditions of political maturity, there is a greater necessity of conscious efforts to create a proper understanding of the society as well as institutions'.<sup>3</sup> Pakistan, unfortunately, has not so far developed a system of education which could help the members of its society acquire sufficient citizens' skills, both in terms of their employability as well as their social conduct. Besides that, "all systems of education have a basic philosophy which permeates its entire spirit. The aim of the traditional Muslim system of education was to produce pious, practising Muslims and it was hoped that the qualities of character engendered by Islam would enable the graduates to play their role in the creation of a moral society. It was further expected that the morality of the society would ensure the social, economic, political and spiritual welfare of the people. It is significant that a decline in social values has always heralded political disintegration in the Islamic world".<sup>4</sup>

Radicalization, by contrast, is a manifestation of deviant and irrational behavior patterns, which reflects on the societal inadequacies in connection with the training of citizens. Radicalization is generally understood as a process which leads to increased use of violence to meet political ends.<sup>5</sup> Most of the writers use the words terrorism and radicalization interchangeably, but the more serious and conscientious writers prefer to use the word 'radicalization' instead of terrorism for current violent activities, because they are dissatisfied with loaded nature of the term 'terrorism'.<sup>6</sup>

Radicalization is seen now as a global phenomenon and no society seems to be free of it. But the nature and the degree to which radicalization has taken roots vary from society to society, depending mainly on socio-economic developments. "If a society is educated, enlightened and economically prosperous, the prospects

of extremism, transforming into militancy, radicalization, violence and terrorism become proportionately dim. But, if the society is backward, under-developed and illiterate, the challenge of extremism becomes serious.”<sup>7</sup>

### **The Vision of the Founding Fathers about Education**

Pakistan came into being as independent state on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947. It is a reality that the areas which formed part of Pakistan were comparatively backward and, in some cases like Balochistan, FATA, Northern Areas, Southern Punjab, Interior of Sind and large parts of East Pakistan, were the most neglected areas of the British Empire.<sup>8</sup> The British rule of over a century did not help Indians, particularly Muslims, to ameliorate their condition as far as education was concerned. The founder of Pakistan, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah alluded to this fact and the challenge that the newly born state was facing, in his message to the First Educational Conference held at Karachi on 27<sup>th</sup> November to First December 1947, in the following words:

“You know the importance of education and right type of education cannot be over-emphasized. Under foreign rule for over a century, sufficient attention has not been paid to the education of our people and if we are to make real, speedy and substantial progress, we must earnestly tackle this question and bring our educational policy and program on the lines suited to the genius of our people, consonant with our history and culture and having regard to the modern conditions and vast developments that have taken place all over the world.

There is no doubt that the future of our State will and must greatly depend upon the type of education we give to our children and the way in which we bring them up as future citizens of Pakistan. Education does not merely mean academic education. There is immediate and urgent need for giving scientific and technical education to our people in order to build up our future economic life and to see that our people take to science, commerce, trade and particularly well balanced industries. We should not forget that we have to compete with the world, which is moving very fast in this direction.

At the same time we have to build up the character of our future generation. We should try, by sound education, to instil into them the highest sense of honour, integrity, responsibility and self-less service to the nation. We have to see that they are fully qualified and equipped to play their part in the various branches of national life, in a manner which will do honour to Pakistan.”<sup>9</sup>

The earnestness of the Quaid-i-Azam about education can be gauged from the fact that he had appointed a Committee even before the creation of Pakistan in 1946 to set the guidelines for education system for the ‘to be state of Pakistan’.<sup>10</sup> Its practical manifestation was the First Education Conference, which was held under his directions within three months of the creation of Pakistan. How this vision should be translated into action, the first Education Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Fazalur Rahman said in his address to the First Education Conference:

“It will be appreciated that it is only through a well-integrated system of education that the foundation of the new Dominion of Pakistan can be firmly laid and it is my earnest desire that this system of education should achieve a synthesis

of the best elements of Western and Eastern educational philosophies and should not only contribute towards the material and spritual enrichment of Pakistan but also foster a consciousness of international collaboration. The present appears to me to be a suitable time for us to survery the existing and future opportunities in the educational field and to make adequate provision for them in the light of the special requierements of Pakistan.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Dilemma of Education in Pakistan – Many Streams of Education without Common Grounds**

Despite all these earlier efforts and initiatives, the subsequent history of education in Pakistan is a disappointing story. A new system of education was required to be evolved, as correctly identified by the first Education Minister, but what was done instead was to continue with the British legacy of education, where a division had already been created between religious and secular education. Dr. Qureshi aptly reflects on this schism, which did not only persist but also exacerbate with the passage of time:

“This bifurcation has dealt such a severe blow to the unity and moral and psychological integrity of the community and the mental and spiritual health of the individual that it poses the biggest problem to the continued existence of Muslim community in India and more so in Pakistan. It seeks to challenge the very *raison d’être* of this Country.”<sup>12</sup>

At present there are many streams of education in Pakistan without any common framework. Pakistan inherited a divisive system of education from its erstwhile masters, the British rulers. During the British rule, there were Government schools, where common people used to send their children, then, there were missionary schools, which were for the elite class, irrespective of colour or creed and, then, there was a network of private schools, mainly owned by rich Hindus. The last stream was the *Madaris*. *Madaris* were again of two categories: one, sponsored by the Government like *Madrassah Aaliya Calcutta* and to some extent *Jamia Millia Dehli* as well as *Nadwa-tul-Ulema, Lucknow*; two, those *Madaris* which were functioning on public charity and donations. The majority of *Madaris* belonged to the second category. Prior to the British rule in India, there was, by and large, a uniform system of education. There was no conspicuous division between religious and secular subjects. They were most often taught under the same roof.<sup>13</sup>

Pakistan, as a state, could not evolve a uniform system of education, despite earnestness of its founding fathers and efforts of earlier education administration. Each education policy document, starting from the Proceedings of Education Conference of 1947 to the National Education Policy of 2009, recognized the need for uniformity, but nothing could be done to convert these precepts into practices. After 62 years of educational history, as late as 2009 the then government says:

“The emergence and continued presence of parallel system of education in Pakistan i.e. Private schools and *Madaris* violate the principle of the uniformity of the education system. This policy is conscious of the historical context which favoured the emergence of the parallel system.”<sup>14</sup>

There are numerous streams within each stream, which practically makes it difficult to define, as to what is meant by 'Mainstream Education in Pakistan'. A brief review of various streams would help define the concept and the extent to which this divisive nature of education has affected Pakistan.

- **Government Schools**

The Government schools are further divided into two categories, first, a limited number of English medium model schools in each major city and second, the majority of Urdu medium schools. Despite all the weaknesses of Government educational institutions, the bulk of civil and military bureaucracy used to come from these institutions. The majority of Pakistan children, nearly 65%, are educated in these schools. The curricula, infrastructure, management and teaching staff are arranged and controlled by the Government. As a result of 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan, education has become the provincial subject, with only nominal oversight by the Government. The new arrangement on the one hand is a response to long standing demand for devolution of state responsibilities, but on the other hand, it is also feared that it will result in further divergence of educational aims and objectives as well as curricula and standards. Government schools have better infrastructure, but the public at large is not satisfied with their quality. These schools, at their most, meet the requirements of promoting literacy in the country but not sound education.

- **Private Schools**

Contrary to the general perceptions, these are not the *Madaris*, which fill the gap between demand and supply of schools in Pakistan, caused by the failure of the Government to cater for ever growing demand of schools, but the private schools which enroll about 30% of the children, according to Government's own estimate and 33% according to neutrals estimates. The percentage mentioned by Christine Fair and her team estimated thus<sup>15</sup>:-

Serial	Type of School	Estimated Percentage of Enrolled Children
1.	Government	64.67%
2.	Private	29.33%
3.	<i>Madaris</i>	1.7%

After de-nationalization of private schools and colleges in 1979 by General Zia's Government, these institutions throughout the country. The private institutions are further divided into a number of categories, including:

- (a) The State-influenced Elite Public Educational Institutions.
- (b) Private Elite Educational Institutions.
- (c) Non-elitist Private English Medium Schools.

In fact, the English medium non-elitist schools are so varied both in type and quality that they defy any classification or categorization. These schools have spread in society, without any effective regulatory mechanism. Neither there is any uniformity in their curricula nor any guarantee whether they have qualified

teachers or not, whether they have sufficient school infrastructure, like laboratories etc. or not. Sometimes, schools in two-room quarters have also been witnessed. The majority of these schools, named as English medium schools, have hardly any capacity to teach any of the subjects.

Contrary to this, the first two categories consist of high quality educational institutions. The state influenced institutions include Cadet Colleges, Military Colleges, and a network of Army Public Schools and Colleges, Pakistan Air Force and Pakistan Navy Colleges and Schools, the Schools and Colleges run by Customs Department, Pakistan Airlines and other institutions. These institutions mostly follow 'A' level and 'O' level programmes, and they also charge reduced fees to the wards of bureaucrats and Government functionaries, whereas, they charge heavy fees to civilian children. The elitist private institutions, like Aitchison, a large network of Beacon House System, City Schools and Roots School System etc, are very costly schools, which generally follow Oxford or Cambridge syllabi and 'O' and 'A' level programmes.<sup>16</sup>

- ***Madaris***

*Madaris* are autonomous religious seminaries, run by their administrators themselves, without any financial support from the Government and, consequently, without any effective regulatory mechanism. The issue of Madrassah reforms in Pakistan attracted the attention of US and Western policy-makers in the wake of 9/11 events. Few US policy-makers had any appreciable understanding of Madrassah phenomenon prior to 9/11.<sup>17</sup> Most of the studies conducted thereafter were empirical in nature, based on econometric models developed from meagre numerical data. Conclusions drawn from these studies contain extreme views. Some of them brand *Madaris* as 'the incubators of extremism and terrorism'<sup>18</sup>, while some call them welfare institutions, catering for the needs of a sizeable population of Pakistan<sup>19</sup>. The existing state of *Madaris* cited by a number of researchers is as follows<sup>20</sup>:-

S.	Name of Board/Location	Maslak	No. of <i>Madaris</i>	%
1.	Wifaq-ul- <i>Madaris</i> -Al-Arabia, Multan	Deobandi	7000	70.85
2.	Tanzim-ul- <i>Madaris</i> , Lahore	Brehlvi	1585	16.04
3.	Wifaq-ul- <i>Madaris</i> Al-Salfia, Faisalabad	Ahl-i-Hadith	376	3.80
4.	Wifaq-ul- <i>Madaris</i> Shia, Lahore	Shia	419	4.24
5.	Rabital- <i>Madaris</i> -A- Islamia, Lahore (Mansoor)	Deobandi (Jamat-i-Islami)	500	5.06
6.	Total		9880	100%

**Source:** Ministry of Religious Affairs and Boards of *Madaris*.<sup>21</sup>

The dilemma of education in Pakistan is that there are no common guiding principles or regulatory mechanism, which may govern all those streams cited above, so as to provide the students with common value system, worldview and essential citizens' skills. Each Madrassah and a private school may be housed in two or three rooms yet have the power to design their own their syllabi, manage finances, hire and fire teachers and staff and set pedagogical practices, as they

wish. Education has never been the priority of our leaders and policy makers. The country continues to suffer either from high percentage of illiteracy or provision of unbalanced education, and sequel to that poverty.

### **The Current State of Education in Pakistan**

Despite enormous leverage to private sector for investment in education and tall claims of public sector to enhance educational standards, the current state of education is extremely dismal, as compared to other countries, as reflected by a report of UNESCO in the following table:-

Serial	Countries	Adult Literacy Rate (2007)	School life Expectancy (Years of Formal Education 2007)	Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary Schools	Public Expenditure on Education (% of GNP 2007)
1.	U.S.A	99%	15.8	92%	5.7%
2.	World	84%	11.0	87%	4.9%
3.	Developing Countries	80%	10.4	86%	4.5%
4.	Sub Saharan Africa	62%	8.6	73%	5.5%
5.	South and West Asia	64%	9.6	86%	3.8%
6.	Pakistan	54%	7.1	66%	2.8%

Source: UNESCO.<sup>22</sup>

### **Fallout of Unbalanced Education System on the Society: Radicalization and Extremism**

Since the prevailing system of education in Pakistan is far from being efficient, it impacts negatively on various facets of our national life. Some of the fallouts of weak educational structure in our country as follows:-

- **Rampant Poverty**

Pakistan is among the lowest per capita income countries of the world, with huge inflation and low growth rate. Apart from this, there are huge gaps in the income levels of various groups, which result in further stratification of the society. Some areas of the state are clearly left behind e.g. FATA, interior Sind, Southern Punjab and Balochistan. The poor cannot be expected to value the education of their children highly, once they are struggling primarily for their bread and butter. It has been found from the experience that in backward communities neither primary education nor attempts to spread literacy among adults can be successful unless people see some economic benefit accruing from these developments.”<sup>23</sup>

- **Unemployment**

Since a large percentage of the population of the country lacks education, particularly technical education, it results into massive unemployment, which in



turn, provides breeding ground for numerous social evils like smuggling, drug-trafficking, corruption and other financial crimes. A number of studies allude to this reality that unemployed youth are the prime victims of terrorists' recruitment. Dr Qureshi, who himself was a member of Education Committee formed by Quaid-i-Azam and later on Federal Minister, pointed out:

*"This country has a large population and opportunities of employment are limited, therefore, there is an ample supply of labour. But, the labour is not productive as it is in the developed countries, because it is mostly unskilled and not properly trained."*<sup>24</sup>

- **Radicalization and Extremism**

The worst fallout of lack of education or improper education in the case of Pakistan is the spread of extremism and sectarianism in the society. Since the state can neither provide sufficient opportunities to the youth for education nor employment, they are vulnerable to radical tendencies. It is the personal experience and observation of this researcher during the course of service in remote areas of Balochistan and adjoining tribal areas of FATA that once the children do not find opportunities to be registered in the public schools, they virtually land up in *Madaris*, which fail to provide them with a sound education or professional skills. It has been proved by a number of empirical studies that Madrassah education is not free from sectarianism and extremism, which it spreads in the society.<sup>25</sup> The majority of the *Madaris* do not provide any skills to the students, through which they can earn an honourable living. Their only employment is in the mosques, to perform various functions. But, the other streams of education, including Government schools are equally inefficient in providing a technical education to students, which would ensure their employability.

### **The Need for a Balanced Education System**

The states and Governments in modern societies are obliged under international covenants and state laws to evolve effective structures and systems to provide adequate education to their citizens. "The greatest duty of a statesman is to teach."<sup>26</sup> Pakistan has pledged to achieve a 100% literacy rate by the year 2015, a target which is unattainable. Similarly, it is imperative that the education provided to the citizens should be balanced, that is catering for all three aspects of an individual's life i.e. physical, intellectual and spiritual. "Although the primary task of the school is to give letters, yet this is not its most important task. That, in the opinion of many, is the training of character, and it is a duty which has been thrust on the school by the changes accompanying the progress of civilization."<sup>27</sup> The balanced education would ensure the training of citizens in important citizens' skills such as socialization, tolerance, forbearance, the sense of justice, personal integrity and uprightness. Hughes argues that the chief end of the education is character building.<sup>28</sup> The emphasis on character building links education strongly with ethics, because every educational system has to decide what kind of character is its deal.<sup>29</sup> Hence, neither religion can be dispensed with nor life can be divorced from modern developments. Once we analyze the educational practices of various streams of education Pakistan, they seem to lack

major components of a balanced education system. Therefore, there is a need to develop an education system, which may help develop:

- A well rounded personality of a student. He/she should be physical fit, spiritually strong and intellectually finely tuned.
- Sufficient citizens' skills, including clarity on ideology of the state, domestic and global responsibilities, sense of justice, tolerance and the capacity to accommodate differing views and perspectives and breadth of outlook.
- Requisite technical and occupational training, which can help the students in finding suitable employment in society, on the completion of their studies.

We all are well aware of this reality that it is beyond the capabilities of the Governments in recent times to meet all socio-economic needs of the citizens, especially in the countries with huge population such as Pakistan, without the involvement of private sector. But, nevertheless, Governments cannot relinquish their responsibilities in connection with policy-making and legislation. Education is such an important subject that the very survival of the nation depends on it. How can it be left to the whims of the individuals to design the whole scheme of education, without taking into account national aims and objectives, needs of the society and comparability of educational standards to other nations of the world? It is in this domain that there is a conspicuous failure on the part of policy makers in Pakistan. They have yet to come up with a cohesive and uniform system of education, which may have sufficient role of private sector, but wherein all streams of education be guided by common educational principles and ideals. Both *Madaris* and private schools functioning in every second street need to be effectively regulated and integrated in a well-structured national education system.

### **Conclusion**

The rise of radicalism in our society has caused enormous damage in recent years, both to the state of Pakistan and individual citizens. The exact loss to both, men and material, is beyond estimation. There are so many factors responsible for spread of radical tendencies, including the external ones. But, we need as a nation, to undergo a periodic self-examination and set our own house in order. We have not set our educational direction correctly. The famous French essayist Montaigne said in his typical pithy style that "no wind maketh for him that hath no intended post to sail unto".<sup>30</sup> The neglect of education indicates that we have yet to find the post where we want to sail to. No progress can be expected for any nation, unless it makes adequate arrangements for a balanced and purposeful education of its citizens. The deviant and abnormal behaviors of citizens are attributed now-a-days to societal inadequacies and inefficiencies. Yet the education system in Pakistan is far from being satisfactory. There are a number of streams of education in Pakistan, without any common governing principles and regulatory mechanism, which results in the provision of a directionless education to the citizens. Social evils like radicalization, intolerance and extremism cannot be eradicated, unless students are well equipped in citizens' skills, technical and

occupational skills, and they possess a breadth of outlook and awareness about their national and global responsibilities. The establishment and development of a balanced education system would certainly be a major step in the process of de-radicalization of our society.

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