

Countering Religious Extremism through Social Reforms: an Islamic Perspective

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Abstract:

The existence of any states based on reasons to exit and so true with Pakistan as well. Pakistan's existence is related to her ideology which is based on being a truly democratic Islamic state. This research is carried out with an endeavour to find out the causes of extremism in Pakistan specially once it is link with religion Islam; with a view to suggest some social reforms to eradicate this evil from the society in the light of Islamic teachings. This qualitative research is carried out to find out the causes of extremism and its rapid growth in Pakistan's social and cultural extents and it's tagging with Islam and Muslims. Also the impact of extremism on social values and finally the remedies which state can take to overcome the menace of extremism. The study argues that ideological, political, social and economic reforms in the Islamic perspective are immediately required as nation's response to take Pakistan out of the current fiasco and resort to basic principles of justice, equality, and freedom as enshrined in Islam.

Keywords: Islamic ideology, Religious extremism, Social reforms, Economic reforms.

Introduction

Islam is a peaceful religion which connects the individual follower with the Allah (God) by providing him an opportunity to live a life acceptable in a human society. Civilization, tolerance, etiquette, peace and harmony are the hallmark of Islamic culture. Islam is a vibrant religion, its golden principles of liberty, justice and peace can fit in any form of democratic rule (Alex Poteliakhoff, 2012). The system of governance practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) and his Honourable Caliphs, offers ample guidance and does not let the followers astray. Unfortunately, these golden rules have

not been followed in true letter and spirit, instead various forms of governance have been followed, which failed to keep the followers as a true binding force and instead, created dichotomy in minds that resulted into fissures in the society (Gul, 2012).

Thousands of rival authorities were eliminated or subordinated before the existing state structure succeeded in expanding the boundaries of its centralization (Singh, 2004). The nation-state is a western political object, the result of a “competitive enterprise of war and politics” (Brittany M. Wickham, 2019); The evolution of state as enshrined in the Western concept of democracy went farther than establishing control, order and conditions of internal peace. It granted autonomy to various state organs through its own needs and promoted civil liberty and economic growth. In case of Pakistan, people have neither accepted the Westminster democratic norms nor have followed their own particular custom. Resultantly, democracy in its true essence couldn't be implemented despite a number of experiments (Fabio Canova, 2012). Let us be clear - adopting of important Westernized concept of democracy in developing nations may not portend well. The state has to weigh as to whether it has to follow the inherited system of governance (developing nations who remained in the chains of colonialism), or to address the needs of its people while keeping in view the religion, culture and civilization.

Framing Islam as Extremist religion

The Quran states that Islam is the universal religion and is a mercy to all creatures. Islam is a religion of peace. Islam offers a living demonstration of qualities to which all human beings can relate: compassion, mercy, tolerance, and love. The five basic fundamentals of religion Islam are (1) Touheed (believe in the oneness of Allah), (2) Salah (prayer five times a day), (3) Soum (fasting in the month of Ramadan), (4) Zakat (once every year compulsory giving of 2.5% of additional amount by every wealthy person to poor) and (5) Hajj (Pilgrimage).

“By no means shall ye attain righteousness unless ye give (freely) of that which ye love; and whatever ye give, of a truth God knoweth it well”.

Qur'an 3:92

Bearing the label “Muslim” is no guarantee of living by its teaching since Muslims are not a single, homogeneous entity (Wicks, 2006). Nowhere Jihad is fundamental component of Islam yet Jihad is portrayed as the foremost and fundamental component of Islam (Ghannouchi, 2013). Connecting Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Daish and other similar terrorist and extremist organizations with Islam became almost must for western media

and analyst. Labeling Islam and placing Islamic culture as extremist are echoing in order to gain some political and economic gains by extremists who actually follow no religion (Tellidis, 2013). Every terrorist activity in the world has been diverted towards the Islamic society and its norms. Forming Jihad as a must component of Islam does not justify the teaching of Islam (Yusof, 2013). The equality of all Muslims is emphasized repeatedly throughout the Qur'an. There is a direct relationship between every man and his Creator, and there can be no intermediary. This particular closeness between the individual and God is paramount in belief as well as in practice. Terrorism and extremism in the manner that the world understands is the only one advanced manifestation of organized extremism and sectarianism (Winston, 2007).

“Serve God, and join not any partners with Him; and do good to parents, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers; the companion by your side, the way-farer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: For God loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious”.

Qur'an 4:36

An Islamic perspective of Social responsibility

Religion Islam clearly defines the relation between individual responsibility and the rights and privileges of every member in the community. According to Islamic teaching before one claims the rights he must fulfil his obligations.

“O Mankind: Be careful of your duty to your Lord who created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in who ye claim (your rights) of one another”.

Qur'an 4:1

The concept of brotherhood and solidarity not only impose upon the community the onus to care for its members, but also require each inhabitant to use his initiative to carry out individual and social responsibilities according to his capacity and ability.

"None of you (truly) believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself."

The Prophet's Hadith

Islam makes it mandatory for every member of a society to stand and counter the evil as per his capacity.

"Whosoever of you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart—and that is the weakest of faith."

The Prophet's Hadith

Islamic republic of Pakistan was formed in the name of Islam she has a society with a vast variety of hues and intensities of extremism (Ramsay, 2015). Government and people have neglected this menace for an extraordinary long time, and now nation finds itself faced with an uphill and complicated task of dealing squarely with it. As the cancerous growth has invaded and mutilated our social, religious, economic and political structure, it needs to be tackled with immediate and strong steps to quickly separate this diseased mass and throw it away from the society (Rahman, 1999). The extremists are looking beyond the tribal areas to transform Pakistan into a theological state through regime change, invading the society and becoming a state actor from a non-state actor (Akhter F. , 2016). Though the present militancy is mostly confined to tribal areas, but existence of capability in soft regions of Pakistan and a potential of the two combining in future, has created a situation of high security concern. Pakistani society feels suffocated, weak and helpless to act comprehensively against this foreign body invasion (Alammari, 2019). As a matter of concern, a full blown operation may manifest like an armed civil struggle, because the resistance at intellectual, political and physical levels is inadequate (Davis, 1995).

Use of Islamic ideology as a tool to placate extremism

The single most important factor difficult to tackle would be separating the religious feelings from the entire cleansing process, because the perpetrators of this horrific phenomenon took advantage of three exploitable vulnerabilities of religious or sectarian cleavages, poverty and bad governance (Alexander Kotchegura, Demchenko, & Ki, 2020). And now their extreme views and acts have been so intermingled with religious feelings that any strike, ideological or physical, against these entities, would be taken as a war against religion Islam. And that would be the Achilles heel of this entire campaign. An extremist ideology itself will never accept a direct defeat. Therefore, the strategy to counter extremist tendencies transformed into extremist ideologies based on religious motivations, could be nothing else but a superior ideology or a superior argument aimed at changing the total environment to ultimately make the extremist ideology irrelevant (Sandler, 2011).

To prevent an extremist ideology taking advantage of slow pace of change of environment, the hard force must continuously keep defeating the extremists' overt and

covert militancy (Nizami, 2018). Thus, besides the use of force, the extermination of these germs would take huge religious, ideological, political, social and economic reforms. The most pertinent question is; which entity has the moral and physical authority to plan, organize and execute such a move? A group of enlightened politicians, jurists, religious scholars, journalists, media persons and security experts, led by the government, would be ideal to undertake this task (Khan, 2018). So that both the extremists and people at large take it as a combined social response. To make it success change of mind-set and portraying the soft image of Islam is must, which is actual and true face of religion Islam.

Way back to Originality of Islamic Ideology

In the presence of so many interpretations and sectarian leanings, one accepted form of Shariah laws cannot be evolved (Scott , 2015). Forcing the injunctions of one majority sect over all others would neither be acceptable nor practical. Thus the society should resort to basic principles of justice, equality, education and cleanliness (Akhter F. , 2016). These are enshrined in all religions and more so in Islam. Freedom for all and running the state according to the shining and agreed principles of Islam should be the slogan. It perfectly matches with the ideology on which a nation struggled for independence. Nation needs to stop quoting what various leaders said at different occasions rather start afresh, without undermining reason to exist (Idhamsyah EkaPutra, 2018). For this political parties, media and scholars can play vital role. Constitution of Pakistan with some modifications can still serve very well, the compatibility of Constitution of Pakistan with the Sharia and Islamic laws and international human rights law is must (Rehman, 2007). The debate about secular or theological state needs to end Pakistan is neither of the two let the nation be organised according to the Constitution of Pakistan that assigns enough 'Muslim identity' (Abbas, 2011). This idea needs to be propagated and finalised with cogent arguments, keeping it open to progression and modification.

Enforcement of Islamic Teaching of Equality

The Qur'an is considered the most sacred and important source of Islamic Law, which contains verses related to God, human beliefs and how a believer should live in his life (Alwazna, 2016). The human conduct that should govern the believers' life, which is clearly stated in the Qur'ān, is indeed the domain of Islamic Law.

Islamic law prejudice the concept of equality and it is not in favour of any kind of superiority may it be wealth, social status, color of skin or any other identity.

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Indeed the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted"

Qur'an 49:13

An almost total breakdown of law and order has created a "free for all" like situation in Pakistan at the moment. Personal and group motives are being achieved through unlawful and violent means, blurring the distinction between hard core terrorist acts and individual heinous crimes (Gang-hua, 2010-14). Police and lower judiciary have lost their trust and professionalism, thus absence of prosecutions and punishments (panel Jean-Pascal Bénassy, 2012). This existing archaic police force and inefficient lower judiciary need to be completely revamped. For this, vigorous planning, legislations and immediate actions are required (Akhter & Iraqi, 2018). The government and the society need to assert and bring back discipline and civility. The trust in judicial system and policing is the second step required to start movement towards normalcy and social stability. This would entail a well thought out plan and vigorous implementation to carve out an efficient and professional police and judiciary. The best way to achieve all this is to resort to Islamic teachings of equality and justice.

Unified, Progressive and Contemporary Education System

The people who need adherence to morality the most are the callers to Allah. It is unbecoming of them to act contrary to their moral principles, and their refined morality should rather manifest in all situations, regardless of how intense those situations are and no matter how wicked their opponents may be.

The Prophet Mohammad said: "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent."

The Prophet's Hadith [Saheeh Al-Bukhari: 6475]

These are the distinct manners of the believers. A believer should always speak good or remain silent. Speaking good has many manifestations, and silence could be of great benefit when no good could be spoken. These qualities can only be inculcated through focused education system. The need for the Muslim community of Pakistan is to educate their youth with regard to a Muslim 'way of life' and explore the education owing to Muslim cultures and the necessity for implementation of Islamic education (Hussain, 2004). Each child must be provided with equal opportunities of good education and grooming (Cipra C, 2019). Ethical Education imparted on scientific lines that invoke

comprehension rather than just learning would be more fruitful. It should inculcate both logical and creative thinking, resulting in propping up good workers, managers and professionals (Choi., 2020). Adequate opportunities for physical activities and games to such a large chunk of population will ensure high physical standards with probability of more international level players, etc. this all has to be compatible with basic teachings of Islam to produce better human being (Gang-hua, 2010-14).

Swift Economic Reforms

To provide dignity to human souls, the first basic requirement is that they should be well fed (Maslow's theory of hierarchical needs) without begging (Alex Poteliakhoff, 2012). This means providing enough opportunities to the people so that they can earn bread for themselves.

Islam gives a complete economic system through distribution of Zakat.

Allah, Almighty, Says (what means): "...and as for those who hoard treasures of gold and silver, and do not spend them for the sake of Allah, announce unto them a painful torment. On the Day when that [hoarded wealth] shall be heated in the Fire of Hell and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs, (and it will be said unto them): `This is the treasure which you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard."

Quran 9: 34-35

To achieve intense economic activity state has the capacity and well laid out system to collect zakat and its distribution to the needy, however the amount can also be utilized in creating job opportunities and by offering loan for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) to needy people specially youth. Specialists of finance, Human Resource Management (HRM), infrastructure development, etc., should be teamed up for finding a solution to this very important aspect (Davis, 1995). Economic activities must be pushed and spread to cities as well as remote corners of the country to ensure weaning away the youth from illegal activities of narcotics, gun running, abductions and joining anti-state forces, etc. (Colin Adams, 2011). Well-meaning Pakistani professionals can find a solution, the country has seen spurts of rapid development during the tenure of certain regimes. This would become easy if aligned with the principles of Islamic economic system, which would be easily acceptable for every Pakistani. The implementation of principles of Islamic economic system (Naqvi S.H.N., 1992) may be used as an effective tool.

Suggested Remedial measures

- Pakistan has to take a fresh start, without undermining “reason to exist”. The debate about Islamic, secular or theological state should end and to unify on a single “Muslim identity”.
- To bring back discipline and civility, the state and society must assert and carve out efficient and professional executive machinery with no political interference and having clear direction in the line of Islamic ideology (Ambreen & Qayyum, 2018).
- Islam emphasises on acquiring knowledge and seeking guidance from Quran and the life of holy Prophet (PBUH). Most importantly education should be reformed to invoke comprehension, inculcate both logical and creative thinking, and provide opportunities to all alike in the light of Islamic ideology (Akhter F. , 2016).
- To provide dignity to human souls, they should be well fed through improved and stable economy (Crelinsten., 1997). And effective, just and equitable distribution of zakat and other collections can make facilitate this aspect.
- Economic activities must be pushed and evenly spread to remote corners of the country, especially Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Balochistan and other neglected areas. In this way manpower of those areas will also be effectively used and be brought into main stream.
- Inter-institutional wrangling must end and piety, justice and freedom must become the hallmark of society. All is well culture be curbed, wrong doers must be brought into lime light and those perform well must be awarded justly.

Conclusion

Reverting back to the golden principles of piety, justice, freedom of following any faith given by the religion Islam and as enshrined in Islam, will become the basis to fight back at ideological and intellectual levels against the extremist mind set. Provision of good education, economic and health opportunities to the under-nourished and poverty-stricken millions, would provide the bare minimum dignity that human beings deserve, to become worthy of independent thinking, and shunning blind following of exploitative terror mongers. Evolving an efficient policing and non-corrupted judiciary will give protection and confidence to law abiding citizens, by cleansing the society from bullies, thugs and thieves. All the above, can only be achieved through the joint endeavours of all the state organs, media and civil society. The environment now seems to be ripe for bringing about such a transition, if by stroke of luck, we get a good leadership. All inter-institutional wrangling must end and let us join hands to salvage our dear Country from present dangers, posed by a deadly combination of illiteracy, poverty and dismal state of governance.

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