ADOPTION OF NURSI MODEL: THE PANACEA FOR DE-RADICALIZATION IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Radicalization has become an insurmountable problem for the comity of nations across the globe. Resultantly, every society has become infested with extremist and radicalized elements. These radicalized segments of the society create confrontational environment by motivating the masses through speeches, distribution of controversial religious and other literature and by controlling the minds of the people by using many other psychological tools. The main factor behind every incident; whether it is a terrorist activity or an act of radicalism is the lack of appropriate knowledge. Created on religio-ideological grounds, the menace of radicalization continues to haunt Pakistan since decades. A plethora of factors have been identified having caused fragmentation in our society and skewed the education system. Whereas, Madrasah system of education is blamed as the nursery of radicalization in our society, the total monopoly over decision making process of the country of the graduates of the elite schooling system is causing disfranchisement of the vast majority of the youth from the governance structure. A complete revamping of the education system of the country by adoption of uniform education system with fusion of Islamic and contemporary knowledge can bring a positive change. The adoption of Turkish Islamic scholar, Badiuzzaman Said Nursi's (1877-1960) educational model offers a solution to the existing imbalances in our educational system which will not only mainstream the vast majority of Madrasah graduates, but also enlighten the graduates of elite schooling system with the Islamic tenants of governance and thus ensure the direly needed national integration. Being a descriptive research, the paper makes an endeavor to answer the questions about whether the existing education system is the root cause of radicalization and a fragmented society.

Keywords: Radicalization, De-radicalization, Education System, Nursi model, Madrasah Education, Reforms.

Introduction

Pakistan continues to face a multitude of challenges that go beyond terrorism, political instability, and other security related problems which continue to attract attention[1]. The insuperable challenges that continue to haunt Pakistan even after 70 years of independence include: public health dilemmas, energy woes, water shortages, and high levels of food insecurity, to name just a few. However, the epitome of all the problems that Pakistan has yet to surmount is the "Crisis of Education". Unfortunately,

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the crisis of education exacerbates many of the problems that Pakistan continues to face. The uneducated masses complicate efforts to groom future leaders to effectively address Pakistan's many public policy challenges. The un-educated or semi educated youth bulge of the country, with no voice in policy making, unable to get a decent job, are prone to be easily radicalized and thus an easy prey for militant groups.

Since independence the faulty policies of successive governments have resulted in a huge disparity among various regions of the country resulting into developmental dis-equilibrium causing dissatisfaction amongst the masses of the less developed regions. The ill planned developmental policies have led to creation of islands of excellences on one hand in the developed areas, but also seas of deprivations in the remote areas of the country like FATA, Baluchistan, and southern Punjab etc. The disgruntled youth of these areas have thus become prone to be radicalized. The disparity in the development between various regions of the country needs no elaboration. The prolonged lack of attention to development in general, and education in particular, has resulted in a plethora of problems for the dwellers of these areas, the foremost being radicalization of the youth. Education in general and higher education in particular has remained a neglected area for less developed regions, resulting in disfranchised youth, lack of empowerment, and limited job opportunities. Whereas the rampant corruption in the basic health and education sectors has hugely impacted the developmental trajectory, it has also led to youth of these areas being on the brink of being radicalized.[2]

The large segment of the society in less developed areas of the country, with no access to basic education for a host of reasons including economic factors, non-availability of conventional educational institutions and skewed policies of the government has led to mushroom growth of Madrasah stream of education, which focuses exclusively on imparting religious education. This has created an alienated group of youth totally dis-franchised from mainstream activities of the society.[3] This youth bulge has become the easiest prey and the fodder for launch of militancy in Pakistan. The situation can only be redressed by taking revolutionary steps in the realm of education aimed at empowering the youth, maximizing job opportunities close to home and making them part of the decision making loop of the area. This can only be done by introducing a system of education in Pakistan, the beneficiary of which owns the true tenants of Islam, remain committed to the ideology of Pakistan and should focus on brain storming by integrating religious or western (scientific) education vis-à-vis western or modern spheres of academia.

Notional Aspects

The intellectual discourse on terrorism, violent extremism, radicalization and de-radicalization gained preeminence after 9/11.[4] Social scientists have thereafter been offering various definitions of the phenomena, with no consensus and unanimity of opinion thus far.[5] Notional aspects and a unified definition of radicalization remains an arena of intellectual discourse till this day, thus causing more ambiguity rather than clarity.[6]

Radicalization De-radicalization: Process and System Dynamics

Academically, radicalization can be defined as "a process which involves the individual adaptation of various extreme political, social, and/or religious ideals and aspirations, and to attain particular objectives the tactics of indiscriminate violence can be nurtured." "Most importantly, it is a process which involves the mental and emotional preparedness already been directed by any religious or ideological leader to pursue violent behavior for the accomplishment of a specific defined goal." The UK Cabinet Office has defined radicalization as the process through which a person 'comes to support terrorism and forms extremism leading to terrorism'. Radicalization has also been defined as the act or process of making a person more radical or favoring of extreme or fundamental changes in political, economic or social conditions, institutions or habits of the mind.

De-radicalization is explained as "a process typically social/psychological in nature aiming at reducing the risk of an individual's engrossment in, and commitment to, any violent act which is taken in the context of radicalization or extremism." Disengagement is solely "a programme designed for bringing a change in the radical thinking of an extremist only to reduce individual's violent participation".

De-Radicalization Case Studies of Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Singapore

After 9/11, the increase in intensity of the terrorist attacks made many Muslim countries to devise counter radicalization strategies. Different de-radicalization programmes were launched to control the menace of radicalization. Some of the programmes are discussed below.

Saudi Arabia launched a successful de-radicalization programme which helped the state to counter the increasing influence of radicalization in different factions of the society. The country's de-radicalization programme was one of the most successful programmes. Many other countries adopted various features of the Saudi de-radicalization programme and obtained desired objectives.[7] The Saudi programme was funded and monitored directly by the Interior Ministry. The main approach which was adopted during the programme was the prison-based approach at the individual level. This programme further took a broad shape in which the families of the de-radicalized persons were also fed and provided economic and social assistance. The de-radicalization programme was initiated in 2004 under the Saudi government's special strategy named PRAC (Prevention, Rehabilitation and Aftercare). The Prevention strategy was based on education and broadcasting of such TV programmes in which the negative consequences of the involvement of any individual in violent acts were highlighted. The Rehabilitation process was meant for the prisoners to re-educate and re-instruct them according to the teachings of Islam and to teach them that Islam renounces every type of violence.[8] Aftercare was for the families of the detained prisoners so as to make them more neutral and assist them to re-integrate themselves into the mainstream of their social worlds. According to statistics, almost 2000

prisoners were taken into custody for de-radicalization programme in 2004 out of which around 700 were released in 2007.

In Yemen, after the expansion of Al-Qaeda the state was facing numerous challenges including the radicalization of the Yemini youth. The de-radicalization programme which was launched in Yemen is another example of a Muslim majority country trying to counter the threats posed by radicalization. The de-radicalization programme was initiated in early 2002 and was abandoned in 2006 due to the political unrest in the country.[9] The main element of the Yemeni de-radicalization programme was the debate process in which Quran and Sunnah was used by the Muslim clerics to convince the participants of the programme. More or less, the programme had some positive impacts on the Yemeni society and various groups who were once associated with terrorist organizations believed to be dismantled by the state through this programme.

Singapore ran a de-radicalization programme in 2003 when a South East Asian militant organization named Jemaah Islamiyah started its terrorist activities and was also found guilty for the 2002 bombings in Bali, 2002. The programme which was given the name of Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) was aimed at the counseling of the radicalized persons. Islamic teachings were debated with the arrested militants and Muslim clerics were successful in convincing them that violence is prohibited in the religion of Islam.

Analysis
Education Streams in Pakistan

Pakistan inherited different streams of education and is continuing to grapple with the same phenomenon. The government run school system has seen a persistent decay over a period of time and is now the least preferred mode of modern education stream. In the aftermath of 1857 war of independence when Sir Syed Ahmed Khan became the proponent of modern education system, the Madrasahs completely disassociated themselves from modern education to the extent that modern education system was declared to be against Islam. Resultantly, private schooling in Pakistan has become a real phenomena.

Student's Enrollment Statistics
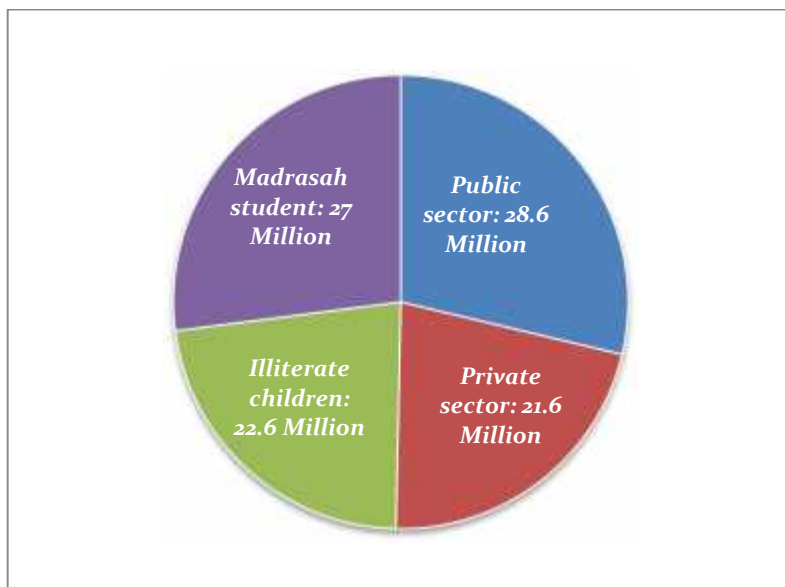
Students Enrollment in different sectors of Pakistan
Source: Pakistan Education Statistics 2016 -17

Types of Madrasah Systems in Pakistan

Most madrasahs are affiliated with one of the five educational boards or '*wafaq*'. One of the boards represents the 'Shia' group while the rest represent the '*Sunni*' groups namely '*Deobandi*', '*Ahl-e-Hadith*', '*Barelvi*' and '*Jamaat-e-Islami.*'

A large number of religious schools work independently of the state backing. They choose to affiliate with '*wafaq*.', similar to an educational board. Every such educational board is representative of an Islamic faction. The biggest such board in the state is '*Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Arabia*.' It has ten thousand madrasash under its registration. The latest board that has been formed in the country is called '*Rabata-ul-Madaris Al-Islamia*.' It has more than one thousand madrasahs under its umbrella.

Schools of Thought	Seminary Boards	Umbrella Organization
Deobandi	Wafaq al-Madaris al-Arabiya	Ittehad-e-Tanzeemat-e-Madaris-e-Deeniya Pakistan (ITMD)
Barelvi	Tanzeem al-Madaris al-Arabiya	
Ahl-e-Hadith	Wafaq al-Madaris al-Salafiya	
Shia	Wafaq al-Madaris al-Shia	
Jamaat-e-Islami	Rabita al-Madaris al-Arabiya	

Khalil, Umair. *The Madrasah Conundrum: The State of Religious Education in Pakistan* (HIVE: Karachi, 2015): 10

Madrasah Reforms: Means to Curb Chaos

Madrasah is the core organ in the conservation and creation of information along with the establishment of spiritual leadership. As per the significance of the madrasah in the upkeep and creation of religious information along with the establishment of the faith-based leadership, the madrasahs are central in the development of expertise in religion. The government intends to modify the syllabi of the religious institutions. Ultimately, the heart of the matter is the kind of instruction and tutoring the religious institutions have been disseminating. Although it was believed that various religious schools in the state kept-on supplying workforce to radical outfits. This attempt was made to avert any step by the government to implement reforms of the religious schools and destruction of unlawfully built mosques in the federal capital. The religious leaders showed resistance to the government attempts. The religious elite considered madrasahs as their personal area of influence thereby repelling efforts towards change by the government.

Nursi Model

After the demise of Ottoman Empire, Kamal Ataturk abrogated the Islamic laws and announced the launch of a secular system in Turkey.[10] The traditional Islamic values, the culture, lifestyle all were declared outdated and a new modern approach took over the minds of people. Ataturk's cultivation of western thought brought about major changes in the Turkish society. Secularism was promoted among sections of the elite which then converted to adopt the western approach as the sole survival kit for progress and development.[11] The new patterns of modern education turned the minds of the youth towards secularism and their Muslim identity started to wane. Moreover, the division between the social classes emerged because of the un-equal distribution of resources and the promotion of the secular (un-ethical) code of living. At that time Said Nursi realized the need for reformation of the Turkish society through curriculum which could be helpful in sorting out the economic, societal, religious, cultural as well as political issues of that era.[12] Said Nursi came up with a balanced approach.

Nursi Model of education comprised amalgamation of Islamic and Western education to understand and implement a reformist agenda based on true principles of knowledge. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1873-1960) was a renowned saint scholar of great prestige who was born in Turkey.[13] He was a living inspiration for his readers, students and followers because of his philosophical intellect and spiritual glory. His proficiency in writing can be understood by his prolific work in the form of a treatise, 'Risal-e-Nur'.[14] Said Nursi was known for his contributions in interpreting the Islamic knowledge of both 'Al-Quran' and 'Sunnah' of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H).[15] He was also acknowledged for his deep insight into the western thought and education. At the start of the nineteenth century, when the Muslim world was facing fierce moral and material degradation, Said Nursi came up with his ideational model of education for the reconstruction and development of the Muslim society. He was a proponent of integration of religious and modern scientific knowledge into the mainstream education system. Nursi believed that for a civilization to re-emerge, it should be imbued with the basic forms of education, knowledge and faith. He continuously propagated a system of

education for the society in which faith and knowledge would be the basic components. He insisted upon the fact that natural or material existence is nothing without faith. He asserted that for the progress of education system the integration of scientific and religious knowledge is the prime requirement. In the contemporary era, the education system comprises only western thought at elite level and traditional (religious) ways of conveying knowledge at the lower level of masses. The newly developed concepts of acquiring skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled education has created an environment where everything has become a commodity and even humanity has become valueless.[16] Many educationists have observed and analyzed the current trends in the education system and categorically declared these as a materialistic approach. Any education system that entitles to promote only scientific and materialist sense, can only provide tools and ways for only a mechanical outcome. The ongoing education criteria are steps towards the alienation of man from the beauties of nature, the concepts of theology and philosophy. The absence of intellect can lead to the loss of wisdom.

A scheme of knowledge based on Islamic values with a comprehensive background of faith, is the most desirable structure of education but unfortunately the adherents of Islamic culture and traditions failed to make it happen in the recent past and in the current century as well. Said Nursi always argued that Islam is the Holy religion with a specific defined structure of knowledge for the guidance of all mankind.[17] He composed this thought that Islam has provided a concrete ground for all true knowledge, and exists as a master guide of all natural and other sciences. His actual objective was to integrate all the existing knowledge with the knowledge of Islam. For this purpose, he established an Institute which he named 'Madrasah al-Zehra' and proclaimed it as a 'sister university' of Al-Azhar university, Cairo. The scheme of study mainly focused on the education reforms including curriculum reforms and integration of both religious and secular ways of education. He was of the view that by incorporating religious and western education in the education institutions, the gap between the secular and traditional minds could be bridged. Nursi's Madrasah al-Zehra was an initiative at the higher education level. He continuously insisted for the implementation of the scheme at lower levels of education so that the secular institutions could be kept in touch with the Islamic education, and Madrasahs could include Western thought.

In modern Turkey, under the leadership of Tayyip Erdogan, the reformed education system has developed strategies to compete with the growing influence of the western education system. In one of his speeches delivered at the Fifth Religious Council in December 2014, Erdogan pointed out the need for 'curriculum amendments' by criticizing the secular thinking of Kamal Ataturk. He was of the view that there should be a balance between the Islamic and Western education. He stressed that religion must be included in the curriculum along with the scientific form of knowledge. Since 2012 text books of major schools of Turkey have been re-designed by adding Islamic history as a symbol of dignity and pride of the Muslims. Tayyip Erdogan's policies of education are more likely a practice of Nursi model.[18]

Application of Nursi Model in Pakistan

The educational policy devised by Said Nursi is as relevant in the 21st century as it was in the late 20th century. In case of Pakistan, the implementation of Nursi model can bring more prosperous changes in different circles of the society and bridge the gulf between the haves and have nots.[19] The main focus of Said Nursi was to investigate and identify various reasons behind marginalization of different segments of the society on the basis of differences in the education system. In various parts of Pakistan, the education system of private and elite schools comprises divergent syllabi in contrast to the traditional and religious seminaries.[20] This creates segregation between the societal class systems.[21] Although sometimes it becomes difficult to incorporate the ideas of different scholars and educationists, but currently the need of the hour is an adequate change in the curriculum of different schools and madrasahs in Pakistan.[22] In the modern times, the proposed education policy of Said Nursi is an important step for the betterment of the society but its implementation does not seem desirable for many education institutes in Pakistan.

It is heartening to note that the present government has realized the skewness in the education system and vowed to correct the disequilibrium between the various educational streams by introducing a uniform system of education[23]. Some school systems in Pakistan are performing well by integrating Islamic and western education. A few prominent schools e.g. Dar-e-Arqam, Al-Huda, Iqra and Dar-ul-Madina are teaching both religious and modern education to the pupils. The fee structures of these schools are economical as compared to the other elite Westernized schools.

The Nursi model can be applied successfully in Pakistan with its vigilant features demanding the change in old and conservative style of education. The model reflects a wave of reforms in schooling in different regions of the country. The Nursi graduates will form the backbone of the society as thoroughly embedded in the tenants of Islam, while at the same time fully equipped to tackle the challenges of modern life. When mainstreamed, these graduates will form a balanced core of youth whose decision-making cycles would be based on the teachings and rulings of Islam.[24] This will redress the grievances and thus be a catalyst in de-radicalization of the society.

Nursi model provides a broader way for the curriculum/syllabi amendments. In Pakistan, most of the times, only madrasah reforms come under discussion. The education reforms at the elite school level should also be discussed at national platforms. The English medium schools working according to the standards of US and UK based institutions must bring changes in their curriculum.[25] The scientific approach must accommodate Islamic history and contributions of Muslim scientists should also be included in the text books.[26]

Research Findings

Based on the literature review, evaluation and survey of various streams of education and analysis, it can be deduced that it is not Madrasah stream of education that has radicalized the society, rather it is the various streams of education that have led to polarization of the society with huge gulf between those in the decision-making

loop and those who are completely detached from the decision making in the country. Unless all the streams of education are moderated, and a uniform system of education is introduced, Pakistan will continue to suffer from radicalization and disfranchisement of a large segment of youth from the mainstream policy making.

Conclusion

To de-radicalize a society or a group of individuals, the education system plays a very important role. In Pakistan, various madrasahs provide sect based and hardcore religious education while totally ignoring the Western and scientific education. In order to address the situation, reforms have been introduced. But they have not been implemented thoroughly given the resistance of some madrasah administrations toward the government's initiative and lapses in political will. There is a need to honestly execute the reforms that have been carefully crafted to cater to the situation. Pakistan has been one of the most adversely affected countries by terrorist and militant activities. The government has contributed towards the effort to combat this menace internationally. As a community, the people of Pakistan are peace loving and tolerant towards followers of diverse beliefs. The masses generally do not believe in marginalizing one another on the basis of their belief systems. However the global narrative in this regard has mostly not been in Pakistan's favor. Therefore, rather than churning out the same outlook that is being doled out toward the country there should be an honest reflection of the situation by the local sources. The educational policy devised by Said Nursi is as relevant in the 21st century as it was in the late 20th century. In case of Pakistan, the implementation of Nursi model can bring prosperity to different circles of the society. The main focus of Said Nursi was to investigate and identify various reasons behind marginalization of different segments of the society on the basis of differences in the education system. In various parts of Pakistan, the education system of private and elite schools comprises divergent syllabi in contrast to the traditional and religious seminaries. This creates segregation between the societal classes. Although sometimes it becomes difficult to incorporate the ideas of different scholars and educationists, but currently the need of the hour to call for an adequate change in the curriculum of different schools and madrasahs in Pakistan.

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