A Qualitative Investigation of the role of Religious Educational Institutes in promoting tolerance versus extremism in Faisalabad Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Religious educational institutes have crucial impact on the societal attitudes towards tolerance and extremism in Pakistan. This research paper includes the qualitative investigation of religious educational institutes` role in promoting tolerance versus extremism in Pakistani society, as madrassas are one of the most important parts of Pakistani education system. This study aims to investigate the role of religious educational institutes typically called madrassas in promoting tolerance in society or they are promoting extremism in society. For qualitative investigation in-depth interviews were conducted and the respondents were teachers of religious institutes. This study was conducted in Faisalabad and teachers from four madrassas were selected as population. Purposive sampling from non-probability sampling was used. The results show that religious educational institutes in Faisalabad tend to promote tolerance in society as they discourage extremism through their teachings and they promote the counter extremist ideologies in society.

Keywords: Religious Education, Religious Extremism, Qualitative Study, Madrassas

Introduction

Extremism is one of the very prominent issues being faced by Pakistan for more than two decades. Religious extremism is very dominant in almost all areas of the country. The religious educational institutes play an important role in the prevention or promotion of the religious extremism. As a large number of teenagers join religious educational institutes every year and the religious education and religious leadership are being taken under control by these educational institutes in the country. These religious educational institutes are called Madrassas in the local language.

Madrassas influence almost every phenomenon in the country i.e., politics, economy, etc. These educational institutes shape the attitude of general public through the connection of general public with their religious sentiments. These religious educational institutes play an important role in shaping the societal attitudes towards the female education, religious minorities, and LGBTQ+ communities and also in shaping the students` attitude toward the social responsibility and preventing or promoting the religious extremism. As the terrorism is associated with the religious groups in the country i.e., TTP so they also have their impact on the religious educational institutes. So, the religious extremism is directly associated with the religious educational institutes and therefore they play a vital role in prevention and promotion of the religious extremism in the society. Extremism is a complex phenomenon, although its complexity is hard to recognize. In simple words it can be defined as activities like beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions and strategies of a non-ordinary character. It serves as a source of conflict engagement.

It is very important to study the role of religious educational institutes in preventing the religious extremism because they hold the mentality and rationality of a number of individuals in the forms of their students, teachers and people related to them. They control the thinking ability of the students as they brain wash their students. So, they play a vital role in the smooth functioning of the society.

Religious extremism refers to actions and beliefs of individuals or a community or groups who do not compromise on their religious interpretations. This absolute extremism refers to the interpretation of some beliefs or some actions, which are considered unquestionable by the followers of a particular religion. The extremism can be defined as no one is allowed to question on any kind of belief or action done by a particular group of people. The religious extremists can be found in almost every religion and every region of the world.

Objective of the Study

- To investigate the role of religious educational institutes (Madrassas) in promoting tolerance versus extremism.

Literature Review

Religious leaders own most of the religious educational institutes. The religious leaders can play a vital role in preventing the religious extremism in the world as more than 80 percent of the world population is associated with the religion. They may have more space to develop relationships and provide resources that could stop extremist ideologies from taking root (O`Dwyer, 2019). Religion has been an important point of discussion about the violent extremism over the years. After nearly two decades of discussion and debate about the role played by religion as a contributing factor to contribute in the violent extremism (Mandaville

& Musser, RELIGION AND THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT, 2019). Interest and policy making by religious institutes in preventing religious extremism in considerably increased in last few years (Mandaville & Nozell, Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism, 2017). The work of religious institutions in not alone enough to counter the issues being faced by our society and religion. The role of religious educational institutes is very crucial as they carry four steps i.e., leadership of devotion, religious education, fatwa and general religious guidance. They all are necessary tasks in the process of preventing the waves of extremism (Sayed, 2018).

The counter-extremism efforts that have swept through the world seems to have placed schools and universities at the forefront of the global counter terrorism. Similarly, the religious actors are playing their role to counter the terrorism caused by religious extremism by placing the religious educational institutes at the forefront of the radical religious ideas to prevent the society from the violent extremism (Sjøen & Jore, 2019). Since the start of this century prevention of radicalization has become an important topic in discussion in debates about terrorism and sustainable development in developing countries. Research has showed that most of the extremists are not educated, but often has completed secondary or tertiary education. This is also considered that some extremists groups consider that school is best place of recruitment. That`s why education sector is considered a prominent and strong partner in preventing and combatting the radicalization in the young individuals (Sas et al., 2020).

There is no doubt that education is one of the tools that can help eradicating the ignorance that leads to violent extremism (Karman, 2017). Various forms of religious education is present in the world that can be utilized as a tool of preventing and combating with the religious extremism in the world (Ghosh & Chan, The role of religious education in countering religious extremism in diverse and interconnected societies, 2018). Mainstream religious leaders seek to condemn religious-based extremism, the justification of violence as a holy endeavor remains an enduring phenomenon across religions (Lipowsky, 2015). Education has very prominent impact upon almost every aspect of the society. Extremism is also affected by the education. The extremist groups have used the education as their tool for spreading their extremist agendas to radicalize the young minds. Similarly, the governments of some countries such as Germany and Austria have taken steps to add the Islamic theology in their school curriculum to counter the ideologies of the Islamic extremist groups. The religious education can be used as best tool to counter religious extremism (Chang, 2021).

Teenagers and youth are considered as the most vulnerable groups from the influence of the violent extremism ideology. The number of young people involved in violence and extremism has become a global phenomenon. According to the reports of Indonesian National Counter Terrorism Agency more than 1500 persons joined extremism ISIS and most of them were students at the university or college level. The educational institutes became a base for the recruitment of the violent extremist groups. So, they played a very important role in promoting the extremism and violent activities through promoting the violent ideology of different violent groups by providing them a proper platform to promote their ideology through a proper channel to the youth of the country (Mubarak & Razali, 2022).

The role of education in preventing the extremism has gained a prominence among policymakers and practitioners. Tackling violent extremism via education is reflective of a

broader shift toward the prevention from terrorism and the need to identify the enabling environment for extremists to dissect their ideologies and recruit supporters (Fink et al., 2013). Education as a pervasive process has affected all aspects of individual and group life. Preventing radicalization and violent extremism is one the most important issues in the world in this century. The extremist groups are recruiting in the educational settings and education sector is a prominent partner in preventing extremism in the young people (Mohammadi, 2021). The youngsters are used for the extremist purposes are those who lack the religious education and often the education is quarantined for the only violent purposes which means that the proper religious education can counter the extremist mindset and ideology (Mahmut, 2019).

Methodology

This study has opted qualitative research design. In-depth interviews have been conducted to draw results. The population was comprised of 20 teachers working at different religious educational institutes in Faisalabad. Purposive sampling from non-probability sampling was used. Text analysis is one of the useful techniques in qualitative data analysis and used in this research paper.

Summary and Conclusion

Summary

According to all respondents' religious educational institutes are playing positive role regarding the promotion of tolerance in the society and countering extremism in the society. The policies of madrassas are designed in a way that they decline the extremist ideologies and promote religious and social tolerance among their students and teachers. The teachers at religious educational institutes (Madrassas) often discuss the importance of Social and religious tolerance in the classroom to shape the progressive attitude of their students regarding the phenomenon of extremism.

Conclusion

The religious educational institutes in Faisalabad play positive role in prevention of religious extremism. They train their students to be socially responsible and their attitude is positive towards the social responsibility. Overall attitude of religious institutes in Faisalabad is positive in prevention from religious extremism and promoting social responsibility among their students.

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