Salient Principles for De-radicalization of Youth: A Study from Religious Perspective

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Abstract:
During the last decades, there was an increased intolerance among followers of different religions, as evident by the number of reported attacks, thereby causing tragedies on all continents. Violent extremism knows no boundaries and affects every segment of society. Young people are at higher risk in the situation of violence. Young persons are the main targets of recruitment strategies and fall victim to extremist violence. Purpose of this article is to determine guiding principles for de-radicalization strategy of youth from religious perspective.
There is no single solution for combating this issue. Strict security measures can only temporarily suppress which are not sufficient to cover the underlying conditions that breed violent extremism and drive youth to join extremist groups. We need soft power, such as education and religious teachings to reduce the trend. As religion is a full way of life so it also covers the role of education, geo-politics, demography, economy, media, social factors and religious practices, understanding and interpretation. First portion of the article discusses the factors contributing to the radicalization in our society. The second portion elaborates different factors which can be used as guiding principles for de-radicalization with religion as principle determinant. It is clear that formal education and awareness about religious principles of life plays a vital role in the eradication of radicalization. In the past decade, strategies for countering terrorism has shifted from using hard security measures to a more multi sector and development approach.
Keywords*:* Tolerance, Pluralism, Radical, Compassion

Introduction

According to Global Terrorism Database, radical groups killed about 43,412 individuals in 2015, compared to 22,211 in 2013 and 3,329 in 2000. As a result significant negative impacts is observed, declines in tourism and foreign direct investments as well as a significant drop in growth rates in Pakistan.

The education sector is often one of the most critical development interventions as a way of strengthening peace building efforts. Education interventions have targeted high risk groups (e.g., youth), as a way of discouraging violent extremism.

 Quran and hadith were used as primary sources for the collection of authentic information, whereas published data on subject was used as secondary source.

 Islam is a complete code of life which not only changes one's point of view but can also make individuals an essential element of the society. Tolerance is among the basic teachings of Islam where it can be utilized for de-radicalization of youth on all levels of individuals and groups on campuses. It is a mechanistic approach that upholds human rights including cultural pluralism and the rule of law. Through education and time to time refresher courses about the positive role of the youth in the society can reduce the

radicalization among the youngsters, as stated in Quran "the literate and an illiterate can never be the same". Sports and co-curriculum activities can also play a positive impact. World can be better living place by understanding another's point of view and giving virtue to them. The Quran provide an environment where people can fully enjoy freedom of thought and religion. Muslims treats people of the book with great justice, love and compassion. "God doesn't forbid you from being good to those who have not fight you in the religion or driven you from your homes or from being just towards them. God loves those who are just" (Sura-Al-Mumtahina: 8). Radicals can also be settled down by giving them lectures on harmony, where teachings of Islam largely focus on tolerance of diversity, co-existence, conflict resolution techniques, and gender equality. The most significant of these approaches focuses on peace education as a process of world view transformation.

Since the incident of 9/11 and ensuing US-led War on Terror, radicalization in Pakistan has been on the rise. According to McCauley & Moskalenko, radicalization is defined as a "dimension of increasing extremity of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in support of intergroup conflict and violence" (McCauley &Moskalenko, 2008). Similarly, Vidino and Brandon, have defined it "the process through which an individual adopts ideas that are severely at odds with those of the mainstream, refutes the legitimacy of the existing social order, and seeks to replace it with a new structure based on a completely different belief system (Vidino& Brandon, 2012)."After 9/11, religion was broadly condemned as a source of radicalization but later on with passage of time, no experimental evidence could prove that religion and ideology are the causes of violent extremisms.

Factors of Radicalization:
Some of the factors contributing towards radicalization may include:
1. Geopolitics
2. Demography
3. Downtrodden economy
4. Migratory trends
5. Electronic and print media
6. Movement of weapons
7. Failed or disintegrated state etc
8. Religious

   It is also due to a number of self-declared so-called religious preachers who exploit and target already dejected and rejected youth of society who have fallen victim to injustice and exploitation by different sections of society. These preachers are found in abundance on internet and are often in the lookout of opportunity to misguide youth into believing that Islam supports violence and extremism. They are so much disillusioned that they start negating even moderate preachers and label them as being unfaithful to religion and supporters of the West (Aly, 2015).
9. Social factors
9.1   Inability to accept variation owing to intolerance in society
9.2   Inability to settle discords in a peaceful way
9.3   Being subject to injustice and exploitation from different quarters of society
9.4   Not being heard or involved in anything constructive
9.5   Not being recognized/acknowledged
9.6   Not being respected
9.7   Being disappointed with state and its institutions
9.8   Unequal treatment in society

9.9   Favoritism, perks and monopoly to few individuals/groups

9.10   Being deprived of opportunities regarding educations, employments and earning

9.11   Being deprived of belongingness and ownership resulting in identity crisis

Factors Contributing towards De-Radicalization

1. <u>Religion as a source of De-Radicalization</u>

As Muslims, it must be clear to us that the Quran does not ask individual to have "blind unquestioning, dogmatic belief." Instead, the Holy Scripture aims to heighten certitude in the minds of its readers, by presenting rational arguments. The word "Aqala", that means "to connect ideas together, to reason, or to understand an intellectual argument", appears about fifty times in the Quran. The Quran repeatedly highlights the importance of using latent potentials of man's mind and emphasizes on the need to ponder over the creations of Allah Almighty, His mighty mountains, streams, rivers, trees, sun, moon, His provision on earth for the sustenance of humankind, different animals and birds, seas and deserts and these all amazing creations translate into "signs for people who use their intellect" (Al Quran 3:190).

1.1 Interfaith Harmony:

Violence and extremism have often been associated with religion "blurring the cause-and-effect relationship between religion and violent extremism" (Koppel, 2016). Different researches reject this claim that religion in any sense is the cause of radicalization. In fact, it can be attributed that it is actually some misinterpretations of different religions that act as pretext in promoting violent extremism.

1.2 Promoting interfaith understanding and positive aspect of religion:

In this respect, the role of religious leaders is of utmost importance. They should try their level best to counter anti-religious narratives and come up with logical arguments that promote peace and discourage violence. They should encourage public discussions, welcome any kind of queries on any religious matter and take on board all religious groups.

1.3 Religious tolerance and de-radicalization:

The following three factors are mainly responsible for radicalization:

(a)   Identity crisis

(b)   Deficit of sense of belongingness

(c)   Deficit of sense of purpose in life

Identity crisis corresponds to the religion, nationality, and ethnicity of the person. From this identity, emanates sense of belongingness and community. The "sense of purpose in life" is a complex social and psychological concern. This is the reason why addressing violent extremism requires a holistic approach for intervention. Our youth needs a better alternative narrative to address legitimate grievances, social injustice, and human rights concerns of the Muslims.

1.4 Quranic stance on Forbearance:

The Holy Quran states: "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion." (Al Quran 109: 6). Nobody has any right to impose their viewpoint on anybody forcefully. The Quran states: *"There is no compulsion in religion…"* (Al Quran 2:256).

In another verse, Allah Almighty says: "There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So, whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.**"**(Al Quran 2:256)

This absence of forcing and imposing creates more space and acceptability in Islam towards other faiths and people and hence thrives the spirit of tolerance which is vital in de-radicalization.

1.5   Equality not discrimination and de-radicalization:

Allah Almighty states in the Holy Quran: "O men! We have created you all out of a male and female and have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another" (Al Quran 49:13). This means that Allah has created all human beings equally though they are born of two different sexes-male and female yet it does not mean that either of the gender is lesser in esteem, self-respect and dignity from the other one. The two genders are just for the purpose of identity rather than for any kind of discrimination. Islam strongly discourages discrimination on any level. Though both male and female are different biologically, in biological origin, nature and characteristics yet their respect, value and sanctity is the same before the great Lord Almighty (Asad, 2004).

Allah almighty mentions in the Holy Quran that the only criterion for superiority in Islam is piety, fearing Allah and not violating the rights of fellow human beings. Thus Allah says: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Al-Quran 2:256) thereby giving legal status to the narrative of equality in Islam. So, it is the prerogative of mankind as to which religion they want to choose for themselves as God does not advocate religion by force. Archbishop Carey states:

 "Are we really ready to build our relations on equality? Are we willing to give others the right as we expect for ourselves?"

At another place in Quran God mentions: "Unto every one of you we have given a different law and a way of life. And if God had so willed He could have made you all one single community" (Al Quran 5: 48). This means that it is by Allah's willful choice that He has created different religions, otherwise He could impose His own choice too upon humankind but He preferred freedom of religion for them. Hence Islam promotes equality rather than discrimination which is important to de-radicalize any society.

2.   Youth as Positive Agents of Change:

Youth isa pivotal agent of peaceful change in society. We can transform youth, instill confidence in them and make them effective part of society if and when they are engaged in processes that affect their communities.

Strategies for Changing Behavior of Youth

- channelize youth's energy into productive and creative things
- Bring-forth other young people as role models having considerable achievements in non-violence and preventing violent extremism
- Giving opportunity to youth to participate in decision-making processes at all levels of society

3.   Education as a vector of de-radicalization:

Islam has always stressed upon the need for seeking knowledge to the extent that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said: "Seek knowledge from cradle to grave." In another Hadith he says: "Seek Knowledge even if you have to go to China." Islam promotes knowledge in letter and spirit. Quran says: "

"And Allah taught Adam all the names…" (Al Quran 2:31)**.**

The first verses of the Holy Quran began with the word:

"Read. Read in the name of thy Lord who created; [He] created the human being from blood clot. Read in the name of thy Lord who taught by the pen: [He] taught the human being what he did not know."(Al Quran 96: 1-5)

The Qur'an says.

"Are those who have knowledge equal to those who do not have knowledge?!" (Al Quran 39:9).

"The servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say words of peace" (Al-Quran 25:63).

In a verse of the Quran:

"When they hear ill speech, they turn away from it and say: For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds. Peace be upon you, we seek not the way of ignorance" (Al-Quran 28:55).

Moreover,

"So turn aside from them and say words of peace, but soon they are going to know" (Al-Quran 43:89)**.**

4.   **The Role of Patience in De-radicalization:**

Islam preaches patience to all humankind and attaches great importance to it. In the verse of Holy Quran: "Only those who are patient shall receive their rewards in full, without Hisaab (without limit, calculation, and estimation)." (Al Quran, 39:10).

In Islam, blessed are those who are patient and stay humble and persistent in difficult times. Allah has promised great reward for such people. One comes across various hardships in their lifetime but those who fear God and stay strong, patient and never lose hope and faith in God are the blessed ones for Allah has kept for them great reward in the hereafter.

Islam covers all aspects of human life and teaches us to be patient in difficult times rather than getting panicked. Allah has promised His help and support for those who do patience (Sabr) in tough time. As in Quran is said:

"And be Patient. Surely, Allah is with those who are patient."

Those who are patient in tough time, God has promised them victory. In the verse of Quran:

"Surely, Allah is with those who are As-Saabiroon (the patient)" (Al Quran, 8:46).

Whenever going through tough time, we should be patient and take it as an opportunity rather than complaining about the situation and have faith upon Allah's help. Indeed, Allah is with patient people.

Hence patience makes a man to stay humble and more resistant towards adopting path of any radical actions.

5.   **Sports as a De-Radicalization Intervention:**

According to El-Said and Harrigan (2013) "soft" measures were more effective than kinetic approaches in the reduction of radicals. Touted as a simple, cost-effective way of promoting positive social thinking and behavior, sports-based interventions have become a popular component of de-radicalization strategies. These "soft" approaches, which attempt to change the mind-set of individuals, had many benefits including a reduction in terrorist events and reoffending among released prisoners. Most of the emerging literature has come from prison-based studies, with associated evidence that criminals, especially incarcerated young adults, are a particularly vulnerable demographic to radicalization (Mulcahy&Merrington, 2013).

The scientific community has long evidenced the physical, and mental, wellbeing benefits; few would argue against the ability of sport to increase fitness, reduce the risk of disease, and make us healthier, happier and stronger (Beets, &Pitetti, 2005). It can provide resilience and discipline in those dedicated to improving skills; it can facilitate social bonds between teammates, coaches, and competitors (Mueller, etal 2003). Islam encourages various sports such as swimming, archery, horse riding and certain martial

arts and deters anything that may harm physical and mental health. However, more recently, the benefits of sport have taken on a new political salience: indeed, participation in sports has become a central tenet of many crime reduction and de-radicalization strategies (Hearne &Laiq, 2010).

Sports-based interventions are often used in conjunction with educational and vocational activities, aiding in the retention of participants. These programs are often targeted at those who are searching for group belonging, and a sense of identity (Marsden etal, 2017). In addition, sports-based programs and opportunities can help a lot in reducing violent trends in society.

6. **Media as a source of de-radicalization:**

As media plays a vital role in defining societal norms, therefore, entertainment media should display morally and ethically correct notion that inculcate moderation, respect, discipline, tolerance and discourage extremism, bigotry, racism, and impatience.

7. **Role of Civil society:**

Community-development based approach is regarded as the latest means for radical intervention. Faced with violent extremism, we will not be successful unless we can harness the idealism, creativity and energy of civil society groups among youth on campuses (Mumtaz, 2018). Social movements must be empowered to make a constructive contribution in the removal of violent agitations among youth. Engaging civil society in community development actions, coupled with strong support for social, political, economic, educational and civic rights for citizens and equal opportunities for all, may serve as a big deterrent to render the menace of violence and radicalization unattractive (OPEV and NOVACT International Institute for Nonviolent Action, 2017).

8. **The role of library / Books in De-radicalization:**

Apart from imparting knowledge, libraries play a key role in changing mindset of readers. Books are an important source in enlightening individuals, broadening their mental horizons and comforting individuals. Libraries can change the mind of youth through providing them positive material and helping them in identification of negative and positive books writer for their society and world peace. Books take their readers from negative to positive world, show new direction to them and inculcate knowledge-based skills in them. As a result, readers have optimistic approach towards life and they are more passionate towards becoming useful citizen of society.

9. **Family being crucial element in De-radicalization:**

Family plays pivotal role in subsiding de-radicalization in society. Parents must have open communication with their children. The children who are denied easy access to share their problems with their parents often resort to arbitrary sources such as internet and social media for guidance and thus tend to get misguided and misused. Breach in communication between family members often lead to broken and disordered family life which in the long run incurs grave consequences on the kids and their mental and professional growth. Such affected kids then grow up to become threat for the peace of society. Therefore, it is important that parents take their kids into confidence and provide all sort of moral and psychological support to them.

10. **Recommendations for Schools:**

Schools are important platforms to channelize youth's energy in a constructive way. Schools should not be treated as typical educational places meant for lectures, curriculum and exams rather they should be places where our youth should be able to vent their thoughts on all issues of the world either social, political, cultural or even

religious ones. The teachers must encourage open discussions and deliberations among students for it will enhance their critical and cognitive skills and they will be comfortable to discuss any problem and find its solution right in the beginning.

11.   Role of Religious Leaders:

Religious leaders are recommended to play following role:

(a)   They should welcome youth to question religious beliefs and provide logical answers in form of rational arguments rather than discouraging such activities. They should keep their personal likes and dislikes at bay.

(b)   These preachers should be well informed on all kinds of information such social, political, cultural, economic and historical so as to understand youth's problems in a better way.

(c)   These leaders should also be in touch with media so as to rectify if any negative or false news is reported. Some media channels are wrongly do propaganda about religion so these religious leaders should be in a position to counter their false narrative in a sensible and educated way. Youth will ultimately follow them and as a result get enlightened.

Conclusion

In order to put youth on right track, community-based initiatives are high need of time where youth can play considerable role. Providing margin for questioning and critically analyzing things at educational institutions can help satisfy and resolve confusion of youth regarding many issues. This will ultimately lead to de-radicalization of youth as they will fell more owned and feeling of being identified and belongingness will take place which will be a positive omen for the whole society.

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