



RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring Radicalization among Women in Pakistan: Causative Factors and Impact

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the factors driving radicalization among Pakistani females, shedding light on the sources and elements of their radicalization. Additionally, it examines the recent historical context of sectarian teachings targeting women in Pakistan. Employing a qualitative research design, this investigation employs both descriptive and analytical approaches. Through discourse analysis of the data, we provide compelling evidence of the looming threat of religious radicalization in Pakistan. This threat emanates from socially endorsed beliefs, narratives, and popular religious slogans. Notably, extremist elements have adeptly exploited the religious sentiments of Pakistani women to advance their agendas, resulting in a significant portion of the vulnerable population becoming radicalized. This study also identifies several religious groups actively promoting radical views to garner public support. In conclusion, this article critically assesses the statements made by far-right religious parties, highlighting potential shortcomings, and proposes a pragmatic approach to eradicating radicalization among Pakistani females.

**KEYWORDS** Islamic System, Pakistani Women, Radicalization

Introduction

In the landscape of a modern democratic society, the role of women is indispensable. Equipped with quality education and training opportunities and liberated from societal constraints, women become invaluable assets both to society and themselves. Achieving sustainable development and upholding democratic values hinge on granting women near-equal access to education and economic participation. The advent of modern communication tools has ushered women from conservative backgrounds into a realm of abundant information and expression. Yet, this information abundance simultaneously presents challenges to social cohesion and traditional norms.

In our dynamic contemporary landscape, a multitude of novel phenomena are gaining prominence within the boundaries of every sovereign state. Of particular concern is the escalating issue of female involvement in terrorism, both in direct and indirect capacities. This matter warrants a closer examination, and the case of Pakistan offers an intriguing perspective. Here, numerous local and global Islamist terrorist organizations have effectively harnessed the potential of female individuals as a valuable human resource. These organizations have succeeded in radicalizing and enlisting like-minded women, thereby enabling them to assume various roles in support of, and direct participation in, acts of terrorism within the country. The roles undertaken by women associated with Islamist terrorist groups in Pakistan can be categorized into three distinct domains:

**Active Engagement in the Planning and Execution of Terrorist Acts:** In this category, women are actively involved in the strategic planning and execution of terrorist activities within Pakistan. They take on pivotal roles that directly contribute to the operational success of these acts.

**Individual Roles with Direct Links to Islamist Terrorist Organizations:** Within this sphere, women maintain direct connections with Islamist terrorist groups. They provide crucial assistance, including shelter and logistical support, to high-profile terrorists who are on the run or engaged in covert operations.

**Institutional Involvement in Proselytization:** At the institutional level, women play a key role in the propagation of extremist ideologies, particularly within select political organizations. These groups undertake the training and indoctrination of female students and workers, preparing them to fulfill supportive roles as wives, daughters, and sisters of jihadists. Of paramount concern is their role in nurturing and shaping the next generation of potential jihadists (Farhan, May 7, 2015).

In this evolving landscape, it is imperative to comprehensively analyze the multifaceted roles that women assume within Islamist terrorist organizations in Pakistan. This inquiry will shed light on the intricate dynamics at play and aid in formulating effective strategies to counteract the growing influence of such groups.

### **Defining Radicalization**

Radicalization, as a political phenomenon, can manifest in both constructive and detrimental ways. When radicalization transmutes into fanaticism, it poses a grave threat to societies characterized by diverse ideologies, ethnicities, castes, creeds, sects, languages, or faiths. This process unfolds through various stages, commencing with ideological shifts, changes in attire (such as adopting the hijab), shifts in social behavior, and culminating in militant actions. In Pakistan, where religiosity is prevalent, and where a historical tradition of endorsing religious discourse is deeply ingrained, terms like "Khilafat," "Shura," and "Jihad" hold significant resonance among the populace. These terms have even been employed by governments to articulate their political objectives.

Religious leaders and educational institutions repeatedly invoke terminology like "Khilafat," "Ghazwa," and "Jihad" in their speeches and literary works. Criticisms have been directed at women's religious educational institutions like Jamia Hafsa and Al-Huda International, as well as various mass media platforms, for disseminating violent literature that exhibits condescension toward other faiths. On numerous religious platforms and among female students, recitations of religious poetry and narratives of women warriors are commonplace (Khan, January 23, 2015).

A perspective contends that separating religious teachings from politics can effectively curtail the extreme radicalization of women in Pakistan. It emphasizes the importance of individuals recognizing the state's authority in political and diplomatic decision-making. Non-political institutions, educational scholars, and orators are encouraged not to incite women toward unlawful actions that could lead to violence and terror, endangering lives and security in any setting.

### **Delineating Radicalization from Extremism**

The distinction between radicalization and extremism is paramount for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in these concepts. Radicalization represents a pivotal phase in the transformation of an individual or a group, a journey triggered by the dissemination of information through speeches, literature, or educational channels. It evolves when the said entity fervently adopts an ideology, perceiving it as the ultimate and sole remedy for their own or society's predicaments. This commitment drives them to be resolute in their willingness to take action in any direction and resort to a plethora of methods, often illegal, to enact their self-proclaimed doctrine.

While the terms radicalization, extremism, and terrorism are often used interchangeably within the Pakistani context, it is essential to disentangle these concepts before delving into the intricacies of women's radicalization. To initiate this clarification, we commence with a foundational exploration of terrorism's fundamental tenets, subsequently proceeding to differentiate radicalism from extremism. Radicalism, as a political term, predates extremism, a concept that has gained prominence more recently. Astrid (2017) provides a comprehensive characterization of extremism with the following key attributes:

- 1) **Advocates Total Uniformity:** Extremism promotes absolute homogeneity within society while vehemently opposing any form of social diversity and heterogeneity.
- 2) **Embraces Aggressive Tactics:** Extremism resorts to tactics such as terrorism and "aggressive militancy" to attain political power.
- 3) **Rejects Compromise:** It exhibits an utter aversion to compromise.
- 4) **Endorses Force:** Extremism glorifies the use of force as the preferred means to resolve disputes.
- 5) **Opposes Fundamental Tenets:** It stands in stark opposition to the rule of law, majority-rule democracy, constitutional governance, and universally recognized human rights.
- 6) **Leverages Ideologies:** Extremism manipulates ideologies or doctrines, often underpinned by a "faith-based ideology with apocalyptic traits," to achieve its objectives.
- 7) It is noteworthy that those influenced by extremism typically disavow the label of extremist itself.

### **Defining Radicalism**

Paul Hedges contends that the term "radicalization" is a value-neutral concept, encompassing both positive and negative connotations. It serves as a manifestation of a "political doctrine adopted by socio-political movements" (Hedges, 2017). Astrid (2017) identifies the following traits associated with radicalization:

1. **Champions Liberation:** Radicalization advocates for the liberation of individuals and society as a whole.
2. **Engages in Critical Analysis:** When driven by an ideology, radicalization critically assesses and critiques the existing political status quo, aiming to restructure it in a contemporary manner.
3. **Embraces Reason:** It acknowledges reason as a pivotal tool for achieving its objectives.
4. **Rejects Totalitarianism:** Radicalism unequivocally rejects totalitarianism.
5. **Rejects Violence:** Radicalism predominantly distances itself from violence.
6. **Progressive Reformism:** Historically, radicalism has been closely intertwined with progressive reformism rather than utopian fanaticism.
7. **Acceptance of Label:** Those who undergo radicalization do not necessarily find the label objectionable.

Anita Amaliyah offers a nuanced perspective on radicalization, categorizing it into two forms: violent radicalization, where the use of force is sanctioned to achieve goals, and a broader interpretation encompassing socioeconomic changes deeply penetrating society (Astrid, 2017).

Similarly, Adnan presents a view of radicalization as a neutral term, not inherently negative. It is, in essence, an impartial descriptor. Effectively radicalized individuals, whether they support democracy, engage in various societal domains, or exhibit religious radicalization, can contribute positively to society when their impulses are constructive. Conversely, negative radicalization poses challenges to any civilized society (Adnan & Amaliyah, 2021).

In light of the nuanced aspects of extremism and radicalization expounded upon in this section, it can be argued that while radicalism may yield both advantageous and undesirable consequences, extremism inherently embodies negativity. Nonetheless, contemporary political discourse predominantly associates radicalism with negative connotations, often leading to extremism if left unchecked or unguided (Yaseen, & Muzaffar, 2018).

It is vital to emphasize that radicalization is a gradual process unfolding over an extended period, not an instantaneous occurrence. Over time, individuals may transition towards violence, and radicalism takes diverse forms, including both violent and non-violent manifestations, with the potential to evolve into extremism if not properly regulated or channeled.

### **Phases of Radicalization: A Deeper Insight**

The journey from negative radicalization to the eventual emergence of extremism is a multifaceted process, characterized by distinct phases. Understanding these phases is crucial to grasp the complexities of radicalization. This discussion delineates three pivotal phases: Pre-radicalization, Latent Radicalization, and Active Radicalization, providing a comprehensive perspective on the progression towards extremism (Amaliyah, 2021).

#### **Pre-radicalization**

Pre-radicalization represents the initial phase of this transformative journey. It initiates with a pronounced focus on ideology, marking the beginning of antagonistic behavior towards pluralism. Here, religion is politicized, and a sense of individual grandiosity takes root. This phase is characterized by the establishment of a notion that the ideology embraced is the definitive and all-encompassing solution to societal problems, spanning from economic to political issues. Intriguingly, this phase witnesses the fragmentation of individuals into various factions based on divergent interpretations of the ideology.

#### **Latent Radicalization**

The second phase, Latent Radicalization, is where individuals become deeply entrenched in a particular belief system. They begin to perceive their social and political surroundings exclusively through the lens of their adopted ideology. It is during this stage that they firmly believe in the superiority of their ideology, viewing it as the panacea for all societal woes. Furthermore, this phase is marked by the proliferation of differing ideological interpretations, leading to the division of individuals into various factions.

## **Active Radicalization**

The final phase represents the zenith of enthusiasm among the targeted individuals. They demonstrate a willingness to engage in intellectual violence and manifest themselves as fervent proponents of biased behaviors aligned with their ideology.

## **Radicalization in Pakistan: Impact on Women**

Involvement of women in terrorism is as old as the advent of modern terrorism, starting by the end of 19th century. Women played some crucial roles in all four waves of terrorism as elucidated by Rapoport (2013).

In Pakistan, the issue of radicalization among women has drawn significant attention. An illustrative example is the case of Naureen Leghari, a second-year medical student at the Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences. She was arrested by Pakistan's counter-terrorism authorities (NACTA) due to her reported links with Dash (ISIS). Naureen Leghari had spent two months in Syria before returning to Lahore. Another woman, with children, was apprehended while planning to travel abroad to work for the aforementioned organization (The News, January 30, 2015). These arrests sent shockwaves through Pakistan, as the authorities had previously believed that ISIS supporters were largely absent from the country. Subsequent investigations, however, revealed that a noticeable segment of women, including highly educated individuals, had not only been radicalized but also exhibited a willingness to actively participate in endeavors aimed at realizing the Islamic State's objectives (Basit, 2019).

This scenario prompts a critical question: why and what are the underlying causes of this radicalization exclusively targeting women, particularly within Pakistan's conservative and underdeveloped societal framework?

## **Historical Factors and Communal Inclinations**

To comprehend the backdrop of radicalization in Pakistan, it is essential to delve into historical factors. Pakistan has a history of communal inclinations, making its populace susceptible to divisive rhetoric and extremist influences. The experience of living as a minority under Hindu and Sikh rule has left an indelible mark on the collective psyche. The creation of Israel in Palestine, coupled with perceived Western bias, has exacerbated feelings of exploitation among Muslims worldwide. In Pakistan, religious sentiments have frequently been exploited for political gains, with religious leaders, especially those with limited vote banks, using religious fervor to gain popularity. Post-independence, radicalization was at times encouraged by opposition parties in Pakistan, with women occasionally involved in political-religious activities, often aimed at reinforcing family bonds and showcasing progressive party agendas.

## **Elements Propelling Pakistani Females toward Radicalization**

As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that Dash (ISIS) and similar groups have witnessed active participation by Muslim women, including those from Western states. While Pakistani women were initially not prominently associated with radical activities, this trend began to surface within certain segments of society over time. According to Fair (2018) several key elements contributed to the radicalization of women in Pakistan:

### **Relationship with Religion**

In the Pakistani context, the role of religion is pivotal in understanding radicalization. In a traditional society where religious practices transcend personal belief and become integral to socialization, any perceived threats or criticisms against Islam can

trigger religious radicalization. Women in Pakistan, often lacking autonomy in decision-making and access to nuanced analysis, are particularly susceptible to such influences. It is important to note that women involved in religious activities or education should not be classified as negatively radicalized unless they overtly or violently impose their religious beliefs on others.

### **Hostile Mindset**

A hostile mindset, marked by an intolerance for diversity and pluralism, is another contributing factor to negative radicalization in women. This mindset manifests as an aversion to opposing viewpoints, sectarianism, biases against other religions, and irrational anti-Western sentiments. It is crucial to recognize that radicalized tendencies can emerge from a confrontational stance towards external influences, disrupting the balance between rights and responsibilities (Gul, 2018).

### **Dress Code**

The particular issue of dress code also plays a significant role in radicalization discussions.

In conclusion, understanding the phases of radicalization and the specific factors driving radicalization among Pakistani women is instrumental in devising effective strategies to counter this alarming trend. It is imperative to address these issues comprehensively, encompassing historical, sociocultural, and religious dimensions, to mitigate the impact of radicalization and its potential consequences.

### **Phases of Radicalization: An Analytical Perspective**

The journey towards radicalization encompasses several discernible phases, each marked by its distinctive attributes. This discussion dissects these phases, providing an in-depth exploration into the process of radicalization.

### **Militant Views and Extremism**

Militancy constitutes a pivotal factor within the radicalization paradigm. Women who exhibit a proclivity for employing force or endorse militant agendas are regarded as negatively radicalized and treading the path of extremism. It is crucial to recognize that not all radicalized Pakistani women may directly engage in violent confrontations; even a supportive role in such activities qualifies as extremism.

### **Concept of Global Khilafat**

Arshad Iqbal's observations cast a pertinent light on the concept of global Khilafat in the context of Islam. Historically, Islam does not espouse the notion of a global Khilafat. However, as Muslim rulers expanded their territories, they appointed governors with powers akin to contemporary federal units. This practice subsequently underwent diverse interpretations, some of which championed the concept of a global Islamic government. The concept gained traction among radicalizing elements worldwide.

### **Global Khilafat and Women Radicalization in Pakistan**

The reference to global Khilafat in Pakistan's terrorist landscape dates back to at least 1990. In recent years, far-right factions, particularly religious groups and influential scholars, have rallied around the Caliphate narrative. Organizations such as Sipa-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeG) utilized this ideological tool to recruit Sunni youth and legitimize violence against Shia Muslims. This narrative was later adopted by

Hizb-ul-Tahrir (HT), founded in 2014. The Islamic State (ISIS) further popularized the concept in the Middle East and effectively radicalized both young men and women. ISIS leveraged the idea of global Khilafat to particularly target women, propagating the belief that their exploitation would cease, and an ideal environment would emerge under the global Khilafat. This allure prompted numerous young girls and women from developed nations like the UK and Germany to join ISIS, often citing radicalization through vloggers and technologically adept Islamic scholars.

Similarly, Pakistani young women were a focus of educational and tech-savvy scholars who employed similar tactics to radicalize them, promising transformative changes in the status of women. The global Khilafat narrative, disseminated internationally by Dash and ISIS, extended its reach to Pakistan (Fair, 2018). Subsequently, some women from Pakistan traveled to Syria and Iraq in response to this call. These activities raised alarm within the government of Pakistan, with the National Assembly deeming them a significant threat to the country's security.

### **The Concept of Ghazwa-e-Hind**

The concept of Ghazwa-e-Hind pertains to a prophecy related to a historical conflict in the Indian subcontinent, documented in religious texts. This idea has been employed by pro-Islamic scholars and orators to convince the Muslim populace in the subcontinent, especially in Pakistan, to legitimize militant activities. Mr. Zaid Hamid and Orya Maqbool Jan [popular figures on Youtube] have endorsed this concept, leading to several potential ramifications:

- **Potential for Extremism:** The concept can sway individuals towards extremism within Pakistan.
- **Militant Groups' Utilization:** Various militant groups can reinterpret and exploit this concept for their own purposes.
- **Historical Roots:** The concept's connection to pre-independence history adds depth to its appeal among radicalized groups.
- **Nuclear Weapons Concern:** Members of radicalized groups influenced by this concept might seek access to nuclear weapons.
- **Impact on India-Pakistan Relations:** The concept could lead to heightened tensions, with India potentially responding through force, propaganda, conspiracies, or counterattacks, thereby destabilizing the region.
- **Local vs. Global:** Importantly, the concept of Ghazwa-e-Hind is predominantly popular at the local level within Pakistan and is not inherently tied to the ideology of global Khilafat. However, its relevance cannot be dismissed, especially in light of the presence of ISIS in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region.

### **Women Radicalization in Madrassas and Militant Groups in Pakistan**

This section delves into a critical aspect of the radicalization landscape: the potential connection between militant groups and Pakistani female seminaries, or Madrassas. The association between Madrassas and extremism gained prominence following the 9/11 attacks, with male Madrassas accused of promoting extremism and sectarianism (Khan, 2017). However, female Madrassas largely evaded scrutiny until the Jamia Hafsa incident. Following a period of relative calm, the resurgence of groups like ISIS and Dash revived concerns regarding radicalization within female Madrassas. This section seeks to investigate this relationship in depth.

## **Lashkar-e-Taiba: A Nexus of Women Radicalization**

The realm of women's militancy unfolds on a dual trajectory: it nurtures two distinct roles for women - one as supporters, facilitating and encouraging male family members in their pursuit of jihad, and the other as active participants in jihad itself. Historically, women in madrassas predominantly embraced the former role, that of supporters. However, a shift emerged, notably within institutions affiliated with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD), urging women to assume a more hands-on role in driving change.

### **LeT's Network of Highly Educated Women**

Lydia Khalil's observations shed light on LeT, an organization boasting an extensive network of madrassas across Pakistan. These madrassas are bolstered by a cadre of highly educated women committed to the organization's cause. These women invest considerable effort in producing persuasive literature and are adept orators. Remarkably, the female wing of LeT surpasses its male counterpart in disseminating radical literature within girls' madrassas, inciting envy among girls who aspire to partake in jihad. The message conveyed to them emphasizes that they can fulfill their religious duties by persuading male family members to embark on the path of jihad (Khalil, 2019).

### **The Impact of 9/11 on LeT and JuD**

The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks had far-reaching consequences for militant groups worldwide and the political landscape. Pakistan, aligning with the USA in the global war on terror, declared LeT, previously active in occupied Jammu & Kashmir, illegal and subsequently banned the organization. LeT adopted a new identity and diversified its activities to encompass social services, educational initiatives, and the dissemination of ideological literature. Women were emotionally appealed to counter anti-jihad propaganda. The recruitment of women extended to JuD as well.

According to Ahmad Khan's investigation, Jamat-ud-Dawa oversees approximately thirty-three madrassas, instructing over a thousand disciples. Yasmin (2017), attests to JuD's vibrant women's wing, complete with its own publications and regular meetings. Female madrassas in urban and rural settings are as active and influential as their male counterparts. Faculty members of these female madrassas play a pivotal role in convincing mothers and families to endorse jihad and send their sons for this noble cause. Both LeT and JuD have effectively marshaled support for jihad among women, creating a conducive context for radicalization.

### **Jamia Hafsa: A Radical Epicenter**

Jamia Hafsa, Islamabad, catapulted to international attention, standing out as the first female madrassa to challenge the government's authority in Pakistan's capital. Established in 1992 as a subsidiary of Jamiat-ul-Uloom Al-Islamia Al-Fredia, this institution initially aimed to provide religious education to local women. However, its trajectory took a radical turn when unauthorized encroachments led to confrontations with the capital's authorities. Female students were deployed to occupy the children's library, and when denied, a "Burqa Brigade" of students staged an incursion. Jamia Hafsa students demanded the strict implementation of Sharia in Pakistan and engaged in confrontations against those deemed in violation of purdah in nearby markets. The Sharia Court of Lal Masjid issued fatwas against government actions, further escalating tensions (Zahid, May 7, 2015).

Farhan Zahid observed that in 2014, Jamia Hafsa students produced a video pledging loyalty to Caliph Abu Bakr Baghdadi, signaling a shift from supporting the Taliban to endorsing Daesh (ISIS). This development raised alarms, as Daesh actively encourages women's participation in combat, thus utilizing Western and Middle Eastern radicalized



women for their jihad missions. The transformation of Jamia Hafsa students from local activism to pledging allegiance to a global extremist group underscored the potential for radicalization (Zahid, 2019).

### **Al-Huda International: A Paradox of Extremism**

Founded in 1994 by Dr. Farhat Hashmi, daughter of Qazi Hussain Ahmad, Al-Huda International seeks to educate Muslim women in Pakistan about religion, emphasizing the study of authentic Islamic sources such as the Quran and Hadith. While the institution disavows extremist ideologies and violence, some of its students, including Tashfeen Malik, the San Bernardino Shooter, and others, were drawn to radicalism. This raises questions about whether it was the institution's teachings or the students' personal choices that propelled them towards radicalization.

Worldviews expressed by certain associates of Al-Huda International indicate a propensity to support extremist ideologies. Basit (2019) contends that institutions like Al-Huda, Tanzeem-e Islami, and Hizb Ut-Tahrir espouse ideologies aligned with extremist groups, affording students greater latitude to gravitate toward radicalization even when the institution officially distances itself from extremism and violence. Thus, Al-Huda serves as a potential site for radicalization (Zahid, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

The phenomenon of radicalization among women in Pakistan is multifaceted and shaped by a complex interplay of factors. While some madrassas may exhibit tendencies towards radical views, even in the absence of direct ties to radical organizations, they provide a conducive environment for socialization that promotes radicalism. Moreover, militant groups employ various channels, including personal connections and family ties, to recruit women for their missions. Understanding the intricacies of women's radicalization in Pakistan necessitates in-depth individual studies of pro-violent groups and their recruitment strategies.

In Pakistan, the landscape of radicalization is not confined to traditional madrassas or militant organizations alone. A more nuanced picture emerges when we delve into the various platforms that facilitate the radicalization of the public, with a particular focus on women. This transformation is facilitated through a continuous stream of literature, documentaries, videos, and social media content, often laden with conspiracy theories and hate speeches that tap into the sentiments of youth, especially those who are educated. Disturbingly, many influential figures in society are propagating extremist ideologies, making these narratives, with their emotional appeal, increasingly popular among young individuals.

Extremist organizations employ emotionally charged rhetoric aimed at women, adopting titles like "We the Mothers of Lashkar-e-Taiba" or "From Our Sisters, To Our Sisters" in their outreach efforts (Don, 2013). Periodicals like "Dabiq" strategically target female readers to recruit new adherents. The Pakistani Taliban even launched a journal called "Sunnat-e-Khaura," intended to indoctrinate Pakistani women into militancy (Bari, 2010). This publication includes directives for women to organize covert gatherings, disseminate Jihad materials, conduct physical training sessions, and familiarize themselves with weapons, particularly explosives.

In addition, Ms. Um-e-Hamad from Dar-ul-Undlas in Lahore produces poetry, both written and sung, that carries radical and anti-state sentiments. Her novels, titled "Quean Pukarta Ha" and "Manzil Mari Shahadat," serve as further examples of extremist literature that warrants the attention of the Pakistani government (Frud, 2017).

Sectarian literature, often rooted in conspiracy theories, plays a significant role in radicalizing society. According to The Express Tribune, militant organizations, religious seminaries, and sectarian groups routinely record speeches by professional orators and disseminate hate literature, both directly and indirectly contributing to radicalization. This activity cultivates sympathy for groups like the Taliban and fuels militancy.

Some books, unaffiliated with militant organizations, have the potential to influence the worldviews of common women and garner support for militancy. Works such as "Panch Khwateen Sipasalaar" by Mr. Abdus Samad and Zaheer-ud-Din Bhatti's translation of "Asr-e-Hazir ki Mujahid Khwateen" possess strong emotional appeal. Although these books do not explicitly call for violent acts, they can influence women who lack critical thinking skills.

While terrorism and violent activities have historically been associated with men, pro-militant organizations have increasingly turned to women to advance their agendas. Globally, instances of women's involvement in terrorism have been noted in various countries, including Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guatemala, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Macedonia, Nepal, Peru, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and others. This phenomenon is not confined to one region but is spreading.

The recent surge in Islamist terrorism involving women, particularly in the Middle East, has a ripple effect that extends to other regions, including Pakistan. In a society with deeply rooted religious values, Pakistani women are susceptible to radicalization. Factors such as the Afghan Jihad, the aftermath of 9/11, and the strategic infiltration of Daesh in the region heighten the risk of extremism. The evolving global order also poses significant security challenges for Pakistan.

Pakistan's female population, with its unique vulnerabilities, becomes an attractive target for radicalization, facilitated by certain religious seminaries and extremist organizations. In a conservative society where women often lack economic independence, they are more susceptible to the lure of lofty yet perilous activities compared to their male counterparts, who bear the dual burden of earning a living.

Women's radicalization involves a gradual shift in mindset, characterized by anti-moderate and extreme behavior, often driven by a desire to forcefully impose their worldview on others. This shift may eventually lead to violent or non-violent extremism. Female madrasa students tend to exhibit inflexibility towards differing opinions and change, often fueled by conspiracy theories and a propensity to blame external factors. Consequently, they may develop hostile attitudes towards the West and harbor violent inclinations. To mitigate these challenges, madrasas should be brought under educational standards that align with international norms.

Another significant driver of religious radicalism is the desire to implement an Islamic political system in Pakistan and other Muslim countries. Religious elites misinterpret this idea to criticize contemporary political systems, fostering an environment conducive to militancy. This trend should be addressed through seminars, discussions, and dialogues within seminaries to help scholars understand the international political power system and the requirements of a modern Islamic state. Promoting the idea of separating religion from politics can significantly curb extremist radicalization among women in Pakistan.

The university graduates are also getting involved in this process of radicalization. There is a need to eliminate the factors that are convincing them. Social economic injustices, reaction to personal or family experiences, black mailing by particular elements, propaganda and emotional preaching. There is a long list of factors behind this situation.

In a Muslim-majority state like Pakistan, the presence of religious values and ethics is natural. However, adopting a moderate and pragmatic approach, coupled with swift responses to religious grievances by the government, can deter non-state actors from convincing the public to adopt negative views. It is crucial to recognize the state's authority in political and diplomatic decision-making. Non-political institutions, educational scholars, and orators should refrain from encouraging women to take illegal actions that could lead to violence and terror.

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