

EXTREMISM IN PAKISTAN: NEED TO REFRESHING THE GARDEN THROUGH REFORMATION

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Abstract

Pakistan came into being as a truly democratic Islamic state, she was once a state with strong economy, stable government and policies. The golden principles of peace, liberty, and justice were preserved in its basic idea which led to the creation of an independent state. But regrettably the coming generation failed to implement the vision of forefathers. The garden full of flowers is now become bunch of thorn, which requires cleansing and reformation. The current menace of extremism predicated on weak institutions, unstable political system, social injustices and economic turmoil. To counter all, there is a need to have strategies in every sphere of life. The current research article argues that ideological, political, social and economic reforms are immediately required as nation's response to take Pakistan out of the current fiasco and resort to basic principles of justice, equality, and freedom as enshrined in all religions and more so in Islam.

Keywords: Democracy, Extremism, Ideology, Nation-state, Policy, Reforms and Strategy.

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Introduction

The nation-state is a western political entity, the result of a “competitive enterprise of war and politics”; thousands of rival authorities were eliminated or subordinated before the existing state structure succeeded in expanding the boundaries of its centralization¹. The evolution of state as enshrined in the Western concept of democracy went farther than establishing control, order and conditions of internal peace. It granted autonomy to various state organs through its own needs and promoted civil liberty and economic growth. In case of Pakistan, people have neither accepted the Westminster democratic norms nor have followed their own particular custom. Resultantly, democracy in its true essence couldn't be implemented despite a number of experiments. Let us be clear - adopting of important Westernized concept of democracy in developing nations may not portend well. The state has to weigh as to whether it has to follow the inherited system of governance (developing nations who remained in the chains of colonialism), or to address the needs of its people while keeping in view the religion, culture and civilization.

Islam is a vibrant religion, its golden principles of liberty, justice and peace can fit in any form of democratic rule. The system of governance practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) and his Honourable Caliphs, offers ample guidance and does not let the followers astray. Unfortunately, these golden rules have not been followed in true letter and spirit, instead various forms of governance have been followed, which failed to keep the followers as a true binding force and instead, created dichotomy in minds that resulted into fissures in the society.

Extreme Trends in Society Require Cleansing

Today, terrorism and extremism in the manner that we understand (open insurrection as Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan, etc.) is only one advanced manifestation of organized extremism and sectarianism. Pakistani society, unfortunately, is plagued with a vast variety of hues and intensities of extremism². Government and people have neglected this menace for an extraordinary long time, and today nation finds itself faced with an uphill and complicated task of dealing squarely with it. As the cancerous growth has invaded and mutilated our social, religious, economic and political structure, we need to take immediate and strong steps to quickly separate this diseased mass and throw it away from our main body. The extremists are looking beyond the

tribal areas to transform Pakistan into a theological state through regime change, invading the society and becoming a state actor from a non-state actor³. Though the present militancy is mostly confined to tribal areas, but existence of capability in soft regions of Pakistan and a potential of the two combining in future, has created a situation of high security concern. We feel suffocated, weak and helpless to act comprehensively against this foreign body invasion. The Armed Forces of Pakistan are doing their best to fight against the physical epicentres of this malice, but such large scale kinetic operations alone are not the complete panacea for this horrible mind-set. It has permeated into the length and breadth of our society and is deeply ingrained in various tiers of our polity. As a matter of concern, a full blown operation may manifest like an armed civil struggle, because the resistance at intellectual, political and physical levels is inadequate.⁴

The single most important factor difficult to tackle would be separating the religious feelings from the entire cleansing process, because the perpetrators of this horrific phenomenon took advantage of our three exploitable vulnerabilities of religious/sectarian cleavages, poverty and bad governance.⁵ And now their extreme views and acts have been so intermingled with religious feelings that any strike, ideological or physical, against these entities, would be taken as a war against religion. And that would be the Achilles heel of this entire campaign. An extremist ideology itself will never accept a direct defeat. Therefore, the strategy to counter extremist tendencies transformed into extremist ideologies based on religious motivations, could be nothing else but a superior ideology or a superior argument aimed at changing the total environment to ultimately make the extremist ideology irrelevant⁶. To prevent an extremist ideology taking advantage of slow pace of change of environment, the hard force must continuously keep defeating the extremists' overt and covert militancy⁷. Thus, besides the use of force, the extermination of these germs would take huge religious, ideological, political, social and economic reforms. And all this has to be undertaken immediately, by a large group of reformists, belonging to all the above mentioned disciplines. Now the million dollar question; which entity has the moral and physical authority to plan, organize and execute such a move? In my opinion, a group of enlightened politicians, jurists, religious scholars, journalists, media persons and security experts, led by the sitting government, should undertake this task. So that both the extremists and people at large take it as a combined social response. This 'Task Force'

should be given authority to guide and coordinate the efforts of all relevant ministries ensuring synchronized effects against the extremist thoughts and terrorist acts. Following needs to be done in various areas.

Restoring Originality of Ideology

In the presence of so many interpretations and sectarian leanings, one accepted form of Shariah laws cannot be evolved⁸. Forcing the injunctions of one majority sect over all others would neither be acceptable nor practical. Thus we should resort to basic principles of justice, equality, education and cleanliness. These are enshrined in all religions and more so in Islam. Freedom for all and running the state according to the shining and agreed principles of Islam should be our slogan. It perfectly matches with our ideology on which we struggled for independence. I think we should stop quoting what various leaders said at different occasions. Let us start afresh, without undermining our “reason to exist”. For this our political parties, media and scholars have to play an important role. Our present Constitution with some modifications can still serve us very well. The debate about secular or theological state should end. We are neither of the two. Let us organise ourselves according to the Constitution of Pakistan that assigns us enough ‘Muslim identity’. This idea needs to be propagated and finalised with cogent arguments, keeping it open to progression and modification.

Effective Law Enforcement system

An almost total breakdown of law and order has created a “free for all” like situation. Personal and group motives are being achieved through unlawful and violent means, blurring the distinction between hard core terrorist acts and individual heinous crimes. Police and lower judiciary have lost their trust and professionalism, thus absence of prosecutions and punishments⁹. This existing archaic police force and inefficient lower judiciary need to be completely revamped. For this, vigorous planning, legislations and immediate actions are required. The government and the society need to assert themselves and bring back discipline and civility. The trust in judicial system and policing is the second step required to start movement towards normalcy and social stability. This would entail a well thought out plan and vigorous implementation to carve out an efficient and professional police and judiciary. A group of retired/serving police and judicial officers may proffer their recommendations. High quality

recruitment, continuous training and grooming with no political interference in promotions, appointments and postings should be the hallmark of a new system.

Contemporary and compatible Education System

Each child must be provided with equal opportunities of good education and grooming¹⁰. That is the only way that we can take advantage of a vast population base (that has nearly increased to unmanageable proportions). Education should be imparted on solid scientific lines that must invoke comprehension rather than just learning. It should inculcate both logical and creative thinking, resulting in propping up good workers, managers and professionals. Adequate opportunities for physical activities and games to such a large chunk of population will ensure high physical standards with probability of more international level players, etc. This would be the most difficult task to be taken on war footings. The Armed Forces to help by first establishing numerous new schools district-wise, and then help in running these schools administratively (and also academically where possible). Various streams of education be abolished with only one or two maintained.

Economic Revival

To provide dignity to human souls, the first basic requirement is that they should be well fed (Maslow's theory of hierarchical needs) without begging¹¹. This means providing enough opportunities to the people so that they can earn bread for themselves. To achieve that, intense economic activity will have to be jump started to create jobs. Specialists of finance, Human Resource Management (HRM), infrastructure development, etc., should be teamed up for finding a solution to this very important aspect. Economic activities must be pushed and evenly spread to remote corners, FATA and other backward areas to ensure weaning away the youth from illegal activities of narcotics, gun running, abductions and joining anti-state forces, etc. Now this is easier said than done. But well-meaning Pakistani professionals can find a solution, as our beloved country has seen spurts of rapid development during the tenure of certain regimes.

Recommendations

- Let us start afresh, without undermining our "reason to exist". The debate about secular or theological state should end as the Constitution provides us enough 'Muslim identity'.

- To bring back discipline and civility, the state and society must assert and carve out efficient and professional executive machinery with no political interference.
- Most importantly education should be reformed to invoke comprehension, inculcate both logical and creative thinking, and provide opportunities to all alike for physical activities.
- To provide dignity to human souls, they should be well fed through improved and stable economy.
- Economic activities must be pushed and evenly spread to remote corners of the country, especially Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Balochistan and other neglected areas.
- Inter-institutional wrangling must end and piety, justice and freedom must become the hallmark of society.

Conclusion

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

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