Pakistan Social Sciences Review
www.pssr.org.pk

RESEARCH PAPER

Civil Society, Gender and De-Radicalization Programs: A Case of PAIMAN Alumni Trust

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
	The purpose of this study is to comprehend the approaches and manifestations of de-radicalization programs of the Islamabad-based civil society PAIMAN Alumni Trust, also, to evaluate the role of gender in this process. Radicalization that ultimately leads to extremism and terrorism has become the potent threat to harmony of Pakistani society. Pakistan responded to this menace with de-radicalization programs, one of the significant strategies of countering radicalization. The failure of the male-dominated security strategies of the state created room for the gender and civil societies. This study is methodologically qualitative, while descriptive and interpretive approaches have also been utilized to deal with the research queries. The interviews, personal observation and archival data are utilized for data collection. It is argued that PAIMAN has made the women and de-radicalization process visible, but it did not make the resilient changes in the social structure because of the challenges of deficiency of funds, traditionalism, harassment and restrictive regimes for civil societies. It is suggested that it should develop the better relations with media, make the alliance of local civil societies and effectively utilize the international donor agencies and advocacy groups for overcoming the challenges.

Introduction

Religious radicalization is posing serious threats to the peace and security of the world. The academic literature has been developed recently for understanding the process of radicalization and development of effective practices for the process of de-radicalization. Crone (2016) explained radicalization as, "a process of embracing extremist ideas" (p.587). Doosje et al. (2016) termed it as "process through which people become increasingly motivated to use violent means against members of an out-group" (p.79). Commonly, it is explained as espousing the extremist ideas and adopting radical positions on social and political matters. At this juncture, radical groups are envisaged as groups which are negative and intolerant, otherwise as termed by OSCE (2018) radicals are the forces of resistance and constructive social change. The ultimate result, as discussed by the Doosje et al., (2016) and Arlington

(2015) is extrmism and terrorism which are inhertently negative for peace and development.

Barrantes and García-Calvo (2017) and Reiter et al. (2021) remarked that to a lesser extend the knowledge is produced for de-radicalization, which is still inundated with confusion and ambiguity. Generally, it is understood as the rejection of ideology of violence, reduction in radical and extremist worldviews, and transformation of beliefs that conforms the mainstream values of society (Horgan & Braddock, 2010)**.** Some authors and agencies perceive the de-radicalization programs as directly designed for the radicalized individuals, with the objective of reintegrating them in society (Barrantes & García-Calvo, 2017). This perception makes the process more as disengagement, which is characterized by change in behavior (leaving radical group and refraining violence), but without departing from one's radical beliefs. Porta and LaFree (2012) and Reiter et al. (2021) argued that de-radicalization described the attitudinal side (transformation) while disengagement to behavioral side of departing from extremists ideologies and beliefs. The de-radicalization programs in Pakistan do not consider them as separate; rather, they integrate the patterns of both, in this process (personal communication, October 22-28, 2021)

Conventionally, countering violent extremism and radicalization were considered as concern of government and specifically the security agencies. They played crucial roles in ensuring security but were unable to address the grievances that persist in society (Hide & Llubani, 2018). This provided the rationale for the involvement of pacific non-state actors like civil society organizations (CSOs). Hide and Llubani (2018) and Qazi, (2013) viewed CSOs, as essential strategic actors in dealing with radicalization and promoting pluralism. Farnood Alam and Waqas Khan (personal communication, January 05, 202), viewed CSOs significant, because they possess local knowledge, trust of the target groups and understand the problem in context.

The process of radicalization traditionally is the subject of male gender. Women are often seen as passive, helpless, subordinate and victim in conditions of conflicts and violence. The victim's perception has gender biases as women played different roles and served as the mobilizers and supporters of extremism (Idris & Abdelaziz, 2017; Fink et al., 2016). Even Fink et al. (2016) described that women joined the extremism, in order to overcome the feelings of being victimized. Fink et al. (2016) argued further that those women were the first targets of victimization, hence as compared to man more willing to counter it. The women effects of de-radicalization were not visible in past, but now there is a shift in adaptation of gender perspective in de-radicalization process. Women's efforts have been recognized by international intelligencia. Women in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are spotting earlier sign of radicalization in their family members, delegitimizing the narratives of radicals and working for women uplift (Idris & Abdelaziz, 2017; Fink, et.al, 2016).

Pakistan is the hard hit country of the radicalization and extremism. The competition for social control and state's patronage has made extremists, so potential, that sometimes it looks, that they are "state within a state" (Gill, Mustafa, & Rizwan, 2020; Mirahmadi & Farooq, 2012). The radicalization has created the environment of intolerance in which the lives of opposite sects and religions are in jeopardy. The state and CSOs have launched certain gender-specific de-radicalization programs for countering the violent extremism and bringing back the tolerance and peaceful co-

existence in the society. This research is an attempt to logically analyze the approaches and practices of CSO's de-radicalization programs and to understand the role of gender in these programs in Pakistan. This study answers the following research questions;

1. How PAIMAN approaches and manifests the de-radicalization process?
2. What is the role of gender in process of de-radicalization of PAIMAN?

PAIMAN Alumni Trust's (PAIMAN) is adopted as case study for the contextual and specific understanding of the phenomenon. This research is divided into five principal sections. First section deals with the main quires of this study. It also gives an overview of the methodology of the research. The second section discusses the drivers of radicalization, the role of civil society and gender in de-radicalization programs of Pakistan. The third section is about the introduction and analyses of the PAIMAN de-radicalization program. Last section is conclusion that provides the reflection of the study, main findings and limitations of this research.

Material and Methods

This research is qualitative and was conducted with the aim, to construct the theory about the role of gender in the de-radicalization process of CSOs in Pakistan. The descriptive and interpretive approaches have been utilized, within the paradigm of qualitative research. The archival data, interviews and personal observation are utilized for data collection. The archival data in form of Government's documents, civil societies' charters, books, research articles, periodicals, newspapers, electric sources are collected. The archival data in shape of research journals, periodicals, reports and blogs were internally and externally validated before use. Eleven (11) civil society activists, comprising the officials of PAIMAN, are interviewed. Six of them, are interviewed directly in Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore, Abbottabad and Mansehra, while, five are approached through online sources. The non-random purposive sampling was used for selecting the respondents, while non-structured questions were employed as technique for data collection. The activities of PAIMAN had also been observed in Islamabad and Peshawar. The data was transcribed and coded, while utilizing the method of Braun and Clarke (2006).

Civil Society, Gender and De-radicalization in Pakistan

Pakistan is one of the main victim of religious radicalization. The economic, social, ideological and psychological factors are the main drivers of this process. The poor quality of education, socio-political marginalization, poverty, corruption, lawlessness, geo-strategic agendas and patronage to some religious forces are the much mentioned causes. The state level de-radicalization programs in Pakistan are half-hearted and lack the comprehensive strategy (Khan, 2015). Basit (2015) and Gill et al. (2020) remarked that Pakistan is disarming militants but literary nothing has been done with their radical mindset. The security approaches eliminated the extremists but they couldn't rooted-out extremism. Therefore, intellectuals such as, Qazi (2013) suggested that Pakistan required the fresh approach that looks beyond the hard power tactics. It paved the way for the involvement of the CSOs in the process of de-radicalization. CSOs have launched the de-radicalization and countering extremism programs. According to a research, presently over 100 organizations are working in this area (Qazi, 2013). CSOs have trained, sensitized and mobilized the people regarding extremism (Mirahmadi & Farooq, 2012). Johnston,

et.al (2016) argued that CSOs have made certain significant programs which the government cannot ignored. The peace activists such as, Muhammad Azam (personal communication, November 20, 2020); Mujtabah Ratore (personal communication, October 15, 2020); Sabokh Syed (personal communication, January 10, 2021) and Amir Rana (personal communication, January 28, 2021), recognized the role of CSOs in de-radicalization of society.

Like other parts of the world, women are presented just as victims. However, women have played visible roles in the process of radicalization and supported extremists in information, recruitment and funding (ICAN, Invisible women, 2019). CSOs engaged women in de-radicalization but as Qadeem, (2019) said that their engagement remained unnoticed and invisible because women are not visible in the public sphere. Anyways, women activists are empowering, building capacity, working for counter-narratives and raising awareness against countering extremism (Mossarat Qadeem, personal communication, January 28, 2021; Shughfta Hayat, personal communication, March 02, 2019). Still, the women activism is in its infancy and has not got that much popularity in outer world.

PAIMAN and its De-radicalization

It is voluntary and non-profit organization which was registered under Trust Act 1882 in 2004. PAIMAN is an Urdu Language word when stands for "promise" and that promise actually mean to link the different communities for peace. Its main office is located in Islamabad while it has regional office in all four provinces (Ahmed Ali & Rizwan Mughual, personal communication, January 28, 2021). In border terms it is a peace NGO, which is performing so many peace functions like protection, advocacy and counter-narratives (M. Qadeem, personal communication, January 28, 2021). The de-radicalization has prime importance in organization, as it is one of the eight main themes on which organization is working. PAIMAN is a gender-balanced organization. The offices have more women than the men and same is the condition of the field workers (personal communication, January 2021). The officials also claim that PAIMAN is the first ever organization that utilized women in Pakistan for de-radicalization (Shafqat Mehmood, personal communication, January 28, 2021). The overemphasis on the women has made some scholars like Fleischner (2011) felt that it is an organization that works with women and on women. It works profoundly on women but the focuses are also the male youths and adults. The de-radicalization program got recognition in the researches of many scholars like Mirahmadi and Farooq (2012), Johnston et al., (2016), Idris and Abdelaziz (2017) and Myers and Fellow (2018).

PAIMAN De-radicalization Program: An Analysis

The framework of PAIMAN's de-radicalization program is developed, while interviewing the officials and studying the available literature on organization. It has two main elements disengagement and transformation. Disengagement has three sub-themes i.e. psycho-social support, true teachings of religion and attachment with market. Transformation also has three sub-themes i.e. counter-narratives, social harmony and social cohesion.
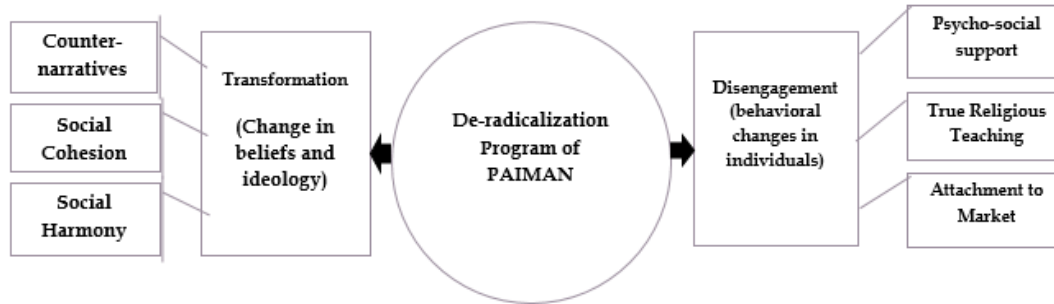
Figure 1 PAIMAN's De-radicalization Program

Disengagement (Behavioral changes in individuals)

The starting point in disengagement is the searching and approaching the radicalized youths. PAIMAN searched, approached and engaged the radical youths and tried to make them normal persons. This approach got international recognition because of the involvement of mothers for this task (R. Mughal, personal communication, January 28, 2021). A project with the name of "Let's Live in Peace" was launched, which targeted the mothers. The purpose was to reshape the values and morals of children and to build the positive mother-son relationship. The mothers' capacity, as mentioned by Idris and Abdelaziz (2017) was built in critical thinking, dialogue and comprehending earlier signs of radicalization in children. Furthermore, for enhancing their status in family, they were given the livelihood skills. Qadeem (personal communication, January 28, 2021) told that "there can only be success in de-radicalization process when women are accepted as the equal agents of positive change in the society." The self-confidence emerged from the workshops made the women able to realize the earlier signs of radicalizations like anxiety, withdrawal and anger. PAIMAN's peace groups *Tolana* (together) also identified the radical youths. There are 36 *Tolana* groups in the PAIMAN, out of which 30 are of youths while the rest are of mothers. The de-radicalized youths could also become the part of *Tolana*. Qadeem (2016, 2018) mentioned that mothers *Tolana* groups held sessions with women and taught them how to deal with the extremism and radicalization. The youth *Tolana* were also catalyst of identifying many youths, as they have relations and contacts with their pervious associates. The *Tolana* groups have approached almost 75000 male and female in Pakistan and this engagement stretched them many radical youths.

The disengagement process was possible because of the availability of agents for disengagement. PAIMAN, as said by its chairman S. Mehmood (personal communication, January 28, 2021) is civil and non-violent organization. It is, therefore, organization utilized civil and non-violent agents for the process of de-radicalization. The agents were both national and foreigners. He further said, "organizations can't work in isolation, we develop the links with all actors of the society including the youths, women and media." Youths, women and women did different activities like art competition, music competition, peace theater and media campaigns. The clergy is termed by many, such as, Farnood Alam (personal communication, January 06, 2021) as responsible of spreading hate and extremism in society. PAIMAN's approach was constructive, it picked those clerics, who were agent of peace and considered violence as anti-Islamic. The academicians and media persons, largely the liberal and leftist in orientation were also part of PAIMAN, in its

campaign for peace education, human rights and harmony (European Union, PAIMAN, 2013; PAIMAN, 2014; PAIMAN, 2020b). Internationally, it utilized the international trainers but now abandoned and only academicians, media persons and activists of organizations like Europe Union (EU), UNDP and ICAN Pakistan visit the organization (M. Qadeem & S. Mehmood, Personal communication, January, 28, 2021).

The disengagement process works directly on the individuals and it has three main phases. The first one is the psycho-social support. Organization has rehabilitated and re-integrated the radicalized youths, by psycho-social therapy that contains the true psychological services, informal and formal education (S. Mehmood, personal communication, January 28, 2021). The socio-physic therapy is essential because extremism have made the youth as fanatics and misfit for the society (Peace Insight, 2010). Idris and Abdelaziz (2017) mentioned that peace groups of PAIMAN also worked on their reconciliation with community, trauma healing and the stabilization in society.

People in society have a little knowledge about the religion and especially women can't read Arabic and lack the knowledge of Quran. As Qadeem (2016 & 2019) said the extremist groups took advantage of this unawareness and introduced the concept of women violent Jihad and recruited and convinced women and youths for the extremism. The youths because of individual, ideological and social factors have already been the victim of the groups. PAIMAN provided the true Islamic teachings which asked for brotherhood and harmony. Organization along with the teachings of Islam, told them about the rights and social roles in religion, which don't forbid them to intervene, if they see any signs of radicalization. They have also utilized the clerics for providing the counseling for radicals, in order to make them able to re-assume the ownership of the communities in which they live (ICAN, Invisible women, 2019).

Along with psychological causes, as discussed earlier, the socio-political factors were too dominant in making people prey of radical groups. PAIMAN has promoted the socio-economic empowerment of women for making them influential in the communities. It also engaged the youths positively for understanding each other's and accepting the socio-economic responsibilities. The women and youths were given the trainings and skills of sources of income like that of fabric dyeing, quilting, samosa-making, bag-making and embroidery. Women started producing all these things at home and their sons sold them in market (ICAN, Invisible women, 2019). Qadeem (2018) said that women learnt the art of marketable skills and contributed to the income of family and also received respect from husbands and sons. The women who were sewing the suicide jackets for the Taliban were now sewing the bags for their family (ICAN, Invisible women, 2019). By this process radical women and youths were linked with the market and it also ended their link with the extremists groups.

Transformation (Rejection of fanatical ideology and worldviews)

The disengagement of individuals guarantees behavioral changes but for transforming attitudinal changes i.e. changes in beliefs and ideology are requisite. The tools of counter-narratives, social cohesion and social harmony were utilized by the organization for this purpose. The main hubs of these activities were the schools, colleges, madrassa and the communities. The agents for transformation were the

pacific elements like women, youths, academicians, NGOs alliance, clergy and international personalities.

PAIMAN used the religion particularly the Quranic references and cultural contexts for countering the narratives of the extremists which made the people radicals. They translated Quran into local languages, and provided the original and contextual explanations which asked for pacific attitude. The utilization of peace perspectives of the local culture, such as, "Do not Harm in *Pashtunwali*," peaceful poetry and stories from literature have also helped them to counter the narratives. It built the minds of extremists and radicals that religion and culture emphases for peaceful environment (ICAN, Invisible women, 2019). PAIMAN also initiated alternative media for peace reporting, because existing media was supporting the narratives of extremists.

Lack of social cohesion is the factor also contributed to the radicalization. The hate against other sects and faiths has provided the spirit and inspiration to the radicals. Qadeem (2016, 2018) mentioned that PAIMAN has built the capacity of the faith and female leaders, madrassa teachers and political leaders in social cohesion and formed a coalition with the name of "Women of faith building social cohesion in Pakistan." They, by accessing education of non-Islamic faiths and dialogue, learned the similarities and differences of rituals and beliefs. Now, they promote the tolerance, equality and respect for other religions and celebrate and support each other in their religious festivals. Idris and Abdelaziz (2017) indicated that they also supported each other's in case of attack. ICAN (2019) elaborated that they by building common goals developed the sense of solidarity. It also created the sense of responsibility among youths ad made them able to respect other's view without feeling the disrespect (ICAN, Invisible women, 2019).

The source that is utilized for the social harmony was the peace education. One of its blog declared; "We have a moral responsibility to bequeath to future generation a culture of peace…. through introducing peace education in all education institution in Pakistan at all level" (PAIMAN, 2020c). Qadeem called it, as important source for combating extremism (Peace Insight, 2010). PAIMAN conducted many surveys for the inclusion of peace education in the curricula of schools and Madrassa (ICAN, 2016). It also made advocacy for change in curriculum and also developed an "inclusive peace curriculum" and introduced it in elite private schools in Peshawar (PAIMAN, 2020a). The Government of Punjab introduced this curriculum as supplement while KPK Government pledged that it would introduce the same in schools. Furthermore, it held many workshops for the capacity building of teachers in critical thinking and pluralism. The peace curriculum and manuals of capacity building of teachers largely contains the elements of peace, pluralism, harmony and brotherhood (M. Qadeem, personal communication, January 28, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The failure of state's led countering radicalizations leads to the multidimensional approaches and initiatives of CSOs (Hide & Llubani, 2018). The women were traditionally neglected as agent for this process (Fink et.al, 2016). Currently, their role has been recognized and there is shift in the adoption of gender perspectives in this practice. This research was an attempt to understand and analyze de-radicalization programs of a CSOs i.e. PAIMAN and to judge the role of gender in

the CSOs programs. The data is mainly collected from non-structured interviews, books, reports, periodicals and research papers.

Research was mainly set to answer two hypothetical questions. The first one was; "How PAIMAN approaches and manifests the de-radicalization process?"

The de-radicalization program had two attributes i.e. disengagement and transformation. The disengagement program is based on individuals radicalization It is found that PAIMAN's disengagement program has three main stages i.e. physic-social therapy, true and original learning of religion and attachment to market. The mothers and *Tolana* groups explored them and then organization arranged de-radicalization agents who detached the extremists them and brought about the behavioral changes in them. PAIMAN had reached to 75000 people in the province and by this rapprochement it found many radicalized youths. The disengagement program of the PAIMAN has de-radicalized 1450 youths, as of the estimates of the project manager Rizwan Mughal (personal communication, January 28, 2021). Transformation program was for all the society. It tried to transform the worldviews and beliefs of the radicals. Moreover, transformation confirmed the mainstream values with the tactics of counter-narratives, social harmony and social cohesion. It is founded that PAIMAN carried minimum activities like trainings, dialogues and workshops for de-radicalization. It is also perceived that it adopted non-partisans, non-violent and impartial interventionists' approaches.

The second question was; "What is the role of gender in process of de-radicalization of PAIMAN?"

PAIMAN as organization is gender-balanced organization. The official staff, the project staff and members in *Tolana* groups have over-presentation of the women along with youths. The women peace groups are acting as agent of preventing radicalization and lobby for the inclusion of women in peace. It is found that the women's work with men as a team but because of the trust of organization on their potential, they were not dependent on men. It is discovered in research that women along with men work for the trauma healing and stabilization in the communities and positive changes in society. They also work for true Islamic teachings and the attachment of the radicalized male and female to the market. PAIMAN as Qadeem (2018) mentioned has trained 745 mothers and they have formed the 30 *Tolana* groups, which are working for the de-radicalization and peace process. The overemphasis on women concerns in Pakistani patriarchal society doesn't mean that it is gendered bias for men because women need more overhauling.

There are limitations of the findings of this study. The collection of data was somehow compromised, because of restrictive space of COVID-19, and the restrictive regimes for the CSOs since 2016. To add more, PAIMAN is working in the socio-religious context of Pakistan, therefore, findings of PAIMAN's experience have fewer applications outside Pakistan.

The progress of the de-radicalization process is slow, as acknowledged by executive director of the organization because of certain disabling factors. The activists faced criticism of the traditional people for working on sensitive issues. They were harassed, threatened and even abducted by Taliban. The low funding has also halted many projects. Still, organization was able to change the mindset of the people, as

those celebrating the martyrdom of sons became the agent of change. Furthermore, though they could not be able to remove the radicalization, but they have made the youths and women visible and active. Its gendered-balanced movement has become the inspiration for many organizations in Pakistan (Peace Insight, 2010; Myers & Fellow, 2018; Idris & Abdelaziz; Qadeem, 2018; M. Qadeem, personal communication, Janurary 28, 2021). The development of enhanced links with mass media, particularly the social media and better working relations with the state and its authorities on one hand and development of alliance with other organizations, on the other, would give strength to PAIMAN's de-radicalization program. Furthermore, effective utilization of religious and traditional factions of society and advocacy for drastic changes in the curriculum would be encouraging. Lastly, the strong links and partnership with the international institutions and advocacy organizations would also be helpful, as these provide the international support and funding.

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