

BARGAD



# YOUTH AND EXTREMISM

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PROCEEDINGS OF SESSION - 3

## ALL PAKISTAN STUDENT LEADERS' CONFERENCE ON PEACEBUILDING IN CAMPUSES

LAHORE: 21 JULY 2009

*This report narrates proceedings of a 1-day session held on 21 July 2009 during the "All Pakistan Student Leaders' Conference on Peacebuilding in Campuses" (19<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> July 2009) organized by BARGAD-an organization for youth development: 1/ 1, Nazar Muhammad Plaza, First Floor, Quaid-i-Azam Avenue Rahwali Gujranwala, PAKISTAN.*

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# 1 – DAY DISCUSSION SESSION

## YOUTH AND EXTREMISM

### 1- INTRODUCTION

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#### **1.1 Summary:**

BARGAD organised a one-day discussion session on Youth and Extremism as part of the *All Pakistan Student Leaders Conference on Peacebuilding in Campuses* (19-24 July, 2009). The key objective of this session was to contribute to the political support against radicalisation of organised youth in Pakistan.

It was an exclusive case in point where more than 88 student and youth leaders belonging to all mainstream student organisations and existing student councils discussed a very imperative subject of youth and extremism, Pakistan has to put up with all through its subsistence.

*All Pakistan Student Leaders Conference on Peace-building in Campuses* has been partially funded by Quilliam Foundation, which is the world's first counter-extremism think tank. Located in London, its founders are former leading members of UK-based extremist Islamist organisations. It aims to challenge the political Islamist ideology, whilst simultaneously providing evidence-based recommendations to governments on policy measures

#### **1.2 Context:**

Being the seventh largest country in world and home to nearly 170 million people, Pakistan is a place of fascinating diversity and immense potential. However, recent years have seen stability and progress within the country threatened due to a dangerous rise in extremist violence. The attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore and the bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad last year have been some of the most stunning examples of a campaign of violence being waged by militant Islamists across the country.

Quilliam's work in Pakistan has thus far focused on combating the insidious rise of extremist ideology through encouraging discussion, debate and dialogue within educational establishments, as we believe that the students of today are the leaders of tomorrow. For this purpose, Quilliam has partnered with BARGAD, to tackle the issue of extremism on campuses.

Subsequently in March 2009, Quilliam and BARGAD held a conference bringing together University Vice Chancellors from across the country, inviting them to share their views and experiences on various themes of the complex phenomenon of radicalisation. The conference culminated in the development of an action plan to which several faculty members pledged their support. Quilliam received a warm reception from the participants and was invited on to campuses to engage directly with students on this issue.

The following month, Quilliam conducted a series of student training workshops and a nationwide tour of university campuses across Pakistan to empower the youth against Islamist extremism and towards values of democracy and political pluralism. During the course of the tour, Quilliam Director Maajid Nawaz delivered a series of lectures at over 20 public and private

universities, addressing over 5,000 students from a variety of backgrounds. Talking of his personal experiences within an Islamist organisation and the journey he undertook to eventually recant his ideas, Maajid engaged with these students to discuss the threats from extremism that loom over Pakistan today.

As well as delivering Quilliam's message, the tour also provided an invaluable opportunity to gain an insight into what students across Pakistan currently think and feel about their situation. A series of questionnaires designed to gauge participants' views on radicalisation, democracy, religious authority, and the relationship between Islam and the state were disseminated at each event, forming the basis for a study currently being undertaken by Quilliam to map the belief systems and practices held by educated Pakistani youth.

The phenomenal success of the tour, coupled with the overwhelming response from Pakistani students, enabled Quilliam to focus on the issue and to conduct more training workshops with students from across several cities. These all-day sessions provided an opportunity for intensive interaction with students to discuss the causes and consequences of Islamist extremism. The end of each session was dedicated to discussing concrete ways in which students could get involved in anti-extremism initiatives within Pakistan.

Therefore in July, Quilliam and BARGAD aligned once again to organise a 5-day national conference for leaders of various student branches of political parties from across the country. It took BARGAD two and half months' hard work to hold the all Pakistan student leaders' conference after initial action planning.

Given the historical hostilities and sensitivities among student organisations, BARGAD's Executive Director Sabiha Shaheen and volunteers with assistance of local volunteer students had to make a national tour for ensuring participation of the young leaders. Individual meetings were held with student organisations, Vice Chancellors of universities and political parties in Quetta, Karachi, Hyderabad, Jamshoro, Khairpur, Quetta, Khuzdar, Bahawalpur, Multan, Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar, D.J.Khan and Muzaffarabad.

Three consultative meetings (10 June, 3 July and 18 July) were held with student organisations in Lahore prior to the holding of '*All Pakistan Student Leaders Conference on Peacebuilding in Campuses*'. This was supplemented with one consultative meeting with bureau chiefs and relevant media persons in Lahore (15 July) along with continuous correspondence and electronic, fax and telecommunications. All this made it possible that the young leaders from every corner of the country assembled in the all Pakistan conference and deliberated for six days on compelling issues like extremism, student politics and unions, peacebuilding, provincial autonomy, women leadership development and national youth policy.

As before this conference, it was deemed unthinkable that student organisations could get together under a single platform because many have known enmity with each other which also has caused the loss of deaths of hundreds of student activists at each others' hands. Many nationalist groups were particularly sceptical to attend a conference in Lahore (Punjab) and thought that a dialogue with pro-federation forces was not possible. However, BARGAD was successful to through its incessant efforts to convince the student organisations ranging from Islami Jamiat Talaba, Peoples Students Federation to Jiye Sindh Student Mahaz to Pukhtun Students Federation and Balochistan Students Organisation and many others to publically talk to each other.

Therefore the event was widely acknowledged as a groundbreaking effort as it brought together individuals who yield an enormous amount of influence over student bodies and campus politics, and thus would prove crucial in tackling extremism on Pakistani campuses and beyond. Through this conference, Quilliam and BARGAD worked to build a consensus amongst student leaders towards collective student action through peaceful resolution of disputes on campuses as well as to direct student potential towards meaningful politics in Pakistan, as an alternative to the violent and extremist politics pursued in the past. Quilliam Directors Maajid Nawaz and Ed Husain addressed delegates on various topics. Maajid Nawaz presented a refutation of Islamist thought and recounted his own journey in rejecting this ideology, while Ed Husain spoke about the history of Islamist movements and their contribution to contemporary Jihadist discourse. A lively debate ensued between Islamist and mainstream Muslim students, marking the beginnings of a process of challenge and change.

### **1.3 Youth and Extremism**

In Pakistan, the relation between Islam and state has been a matter of great controversy. From the time of its inception, the opinion in the country has remained divided as to whether Pakistan is to be an Islamic/'*shariah*' state or a 'modern'/'secular' Muslim-majority state.

Bearing in mind an example of Zia era, as in the field of education, the *Quranic* verses were used to describe natural laws and phenomena in textbooks of physical sciences.

In addition the subject of Pakistan Studies became a vehicle for creating hatred towards the Hindu community and the students were indoctrinated in so-called 'ideology of Pakistan', for which truth was compromised and history murdered.

Similarly the textbooks of *Islamiyat* became a source of controversy between various sects of Islam. The *isnads* (degrees) conferred by *madrassahs* were made equivalent to university degrees, on the basis of which appointments were made in educational institutions.

Moreover Pakistan exhibits symptoms that point to high potential for youth radicalization. The situation is marked by a poor education system stratified along socio-economic lines and disparate economic opportunities across segments of society. These warning signals increase the likelihood for young members of society being lured towards extremist causes. Moreover, the presence of an extremist infrastructure, the impeccable organisational discipline and widespread social networks of Pakistan's Islamic political and militant outfits, a failure of the moderate forces to deliver credible results, and myopic U.S. policies further enhance Islamist influence.

While Pakistan's bloated youth cohort and a noticeable desire among young men to attain education and find respectable livelihoods could act as an agent for positive change in ideal circumstances, a proactive and multi-faceted policy approach is required to generate desirable outcomes. Given Pakistan's strategic importance and its potential to disrupt South Asian peace, the international community has a high stake in ensuring a positive turnaround. Key policy interventions required in the immediate future, while maintaining a broader objective, must specifically target the younger generation.

Therefore Quilliam's work in Pakistan began with a simple wish: a desire to see a more respectful and respected, a more democratic Pakistan, free from the spectre of extremism that looms over it today. Touring Pakistan campus by campus the Quilliam team had the invaluable

opportunity to engage in energetic and often free discussions with students from various backgrounds. Some topics cropped up often, as students put forward their perspectives on the important issues of the day.

Throughout the campus visits by Quilliam Foundation and BARGAD representatives, a sparkling debate took place around use of the words “Islamism”, “extremism” and “terrorism”. According to some students there is no single definition for such words. Few believed that the term “Islamism” was directly related to Islam. Nevertheless, a majority approved that a suitable alternative to describe those who would either impose their own interpretation of Islam on other people, or even kill someone for that matter, did not exist.

It is of course impossible to constructively solve a problem if it cannot be described with words. Extremism and terrorism are general terms, and although a consensus may not exist as to their exact meaning, their reality cannot be denied. Such words can be used to describe people of any nationality or faith. Using them doesn't at all mean that extremists are only ever Muslim rather than some Muslims can be extremists.

Furthermore during several talks within the campuses a subject matter was put forward that, is extremism in Pakistan a cause of internal factors or due to Western intrusion. Respectively a majority were of the view point that numerous trends being followed by people allows such extremist activities to prevail within the country, while some advocated that Western influences are exclusively cause for this observable fact. Drone attacks by US forces is a very recent example, leading towards increased extremist activities in the northern areas of the country, but it would be too imprecise to refer it as the only cause. All things considered, if seeking revenge for American drone activity is the major aspiration of terrorists then how would targeting a *Shi'a* mosque and killing dozens of fellow Muslims, offering their prayers, would help in stopping further violations towards Pakistan's sovereignty by US drones. It is apparent that such incidents are not simply the result of anger at injustice but rather tactics used by people following a specific ideology.

Complex and mingled up factors are resulting into extremism and violence, and despite who is to blame, its continuation amongst us cannot be denied. First of all we have to take the ownership of the problem because that will lead us finding an effective solution to this sarcoma of extremism. We have to be self-critical in order to learn from our repeated mistakes as lacking such an approach we would remain a flimsy nation, pierced with internal combats and with all these flaws could never challenge external alien.

A concern reign amongst the students, that speaking against the dilemma of extremism could hold them responsible for initiating a foreign agenda and tag them as ‘foreign agents’. As being accused of such terms is a common incidence in Pakistan and these allegations have unfortunately hindered our ability to solve problems collectively, since urgent issues are often forgotten in the rush to discredit people with differing opinions by throwing doubt on their motives.

Certainly, a pause to condemn extremism in case it would be perceived as anti-Islam has been an issue for many in Pakistan, including youth. Conversely, separating Islamist extremism from the good faith of Islam would in fact be working in favour of Islam, not against it. Consequently many students support this sentiment and wish to work on this scheme themselves, having been concerned at seeing the unpleasant exploitation of their religion.

Now the rationale behind choosing the students at universities instead of the youth at *madarassah* level which tend to spread more intense version of Islam, is a bitter truth that a greater proportion of Islamist radicals is found among the educated, elite and more socially mobilised ones. Osama Bin Laden or Ayman al Zawahiri are two examples – where the latter being a doctor and the former an engineer, both are highly educated and socially mobilised individuals. It is thus inaccurate to suggest that extremism is restricted to *madrassahs* alone.

Given these realities, it is very important for Pakistan's educated youth to be sufficiently empowered against extremist forces, and it is for this reason that Quilliam chose to work with university students first.

#### **1.4 Session Objective:**

The objective of this one day discussion session is as follows:

- ⇒ To contribute to the political support against radicalisation of organised youth in Pakistan.

#### **1.5 Experts/Chairperson:**

Session experts were Mr. Maajid Nawaz (Director and co-founder of Quilliam) and Ed Hussain (Co-Director and co-founder of Quilliam, also the celebrated author of 'The Islamist', shortlisted for the George Orwell Prize for best political writing) from Quilliam Foundation. The session was chaired by Mr. Muhammad Tehseen (Executive Director, SAP) from South Asia Partnership – Pakistan (SAP) and moderated by Ms. Salma Butt from Quilliam Foundation.

#### **1.6 Profile of the Participants:**

There were a total number of 88 participants belonging to different categories: (i) leaders of more than 22 student organizations, (ii) representatives of student councils, as well as four students (two in favour of the topic and two against the topic) particularly participated in the debate session – “*Main cause of religious extremism in Pakistan – internal or external factors?*”

The names of the students who took part in debate are as below:

##### *In favour of internal factors:*

- I. Imran Khan (Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad)
- II. Rab Nawaz (University Law College, Punjab University, Lahore)

##### *In favour of external factors:*

- I. Abdul Basit (Islami Jamiat Talaba)
- II. Ishrat Saadat (University Student Federation)

Names of the organisations/councils/bodies, whose representatives attended the session, are given in Annexure 1.

## **2- SESSION PROCEEDINGS**

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Before the formal proceedings of the session, a day before, Mr. Maajid Nawaz introduced the Quilliam Foundation to the participants in a meeting at Kinnaird College Lahore. During the introductory session Mr. Nawaz told that Quilliam is the world's first counter-extremism think tank. Located in London, its founders are former leading ideologues of UK-based extremist Islamist organisations. Quilliam stands for religious freedom, human rights, democracy and developing a Muslim identity at home in, and with the West. Moreover he told the participants that the organisation tends to bridge the gap between the view of students and ordinary people who practice a fair and true version of Islam and the way US State Department and Britain perceives a radical version of Islam.

There were many reservations amongst the participants regarding the actions of Pakistan Army, government, US policies and foreign agendas after this brief introduction. In addition the students asked that where Quilliam was ten years ago when a major change was occurring and dust of extremism started to blow within the country. Mr. Nawaz addressed some questions briefly and requested the participants to come up with such specific issues the next day where he will be tackling all such queries in detail.

### **2.1 Maajid Nawaz's Session:**

The formal proceedings of the one day discussion session on 'Youth and Extremism' started with a detailed life history of Mr. Maajid Nawaz. Immediately after Mr. Nawaz's life history the house was open for a question answer session. The session was chaired by Mr Muhammad Tehseen, Executive Director South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, who later on concluded the session.

Mr. Nawaz studied at Newham College alongside the British writer Ed Husain, later he and Mr. Hussain co-founded the Quilliam Foundation. He also holds a B.A. (Hons) from London University's School of Oriental and African Studies and a M.Sc. in Political Theory from the London School of Economics.

While talking about himself he told the participants that he was born in 1978 in Essex, United Kingdom to a British Pakistani Family. As a third generation British Muslim he was raised in an integrated and well-established family yet being a British-Asian teenager growing up in Essex he always had a sense of being different. In fairness, this was not due to the majority of people making him feel different, but because of the actions of a minority of organised racists who made life exceptionally difficult for all around him. By the age of 15, he found himself having to flee random and unprovoked knife attacks and witness his friends being stabbed before my eyes.

He also talked about institutional racism as the first time he was arrested in an armed raid was not in Egypt, but on the streets of Essex. He had been arrested at gun-point for "suspicion of armed robbery". As he and his brother had been innocently playing with a plastic pellet gun, a poor old lady had decided that brown children playing with plastic pellet guns could only mean one thing: they intended to rob a bank. Somehow, the police took it seriously enough to launch a full-scale surveillance operation. They were kept overnight and later released without charge and with an ashamed apology.

He said that with the passage of time he felt a huge identity crisis. The only guidance he could seek was from the mosque Imams, who were from remote areas of Pakistan, mostly from Mirpur. Those mosque Imams were largely less educated, could hardly speak English, therefore much

difficult to understand. This kept on increasing the gap between him and appropriate guidance in terms of religion and other aspects of life. Then he met a person (member of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*<sup>1</sup> from my hometown, who had been recruited while studying at university in London) who was educated and easier to understand, a representative of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, whom he could relate to and seek guidance towards his identity crisis. He told him that all other Muslims groups and leaders have failed to understand Islam and are agents of the infidels, or *kuffar* in Arabic. Islam is a political ideology that must dominate the world, not a religious tradition that can coexists beside others.

Inspired by his way of teachings, politicised and impulsive mind-set Maajid Nawaz started receiving an ideology that advocated a black and white solution to the problems he had grown up with. As a result he got more involved with *Hizb ut-Tahrir* activities, from attending secret cell structure meetings to distributing leaflets that called for *jihad*; he conflicted with Muslims at mosques and including his own parents. Later he became a stable member of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and spent thirteen years of his life as a member of the group. Thirteen years propagating Islamism and training secret cells. In 1999, after Pakistan acquired a nuclear bomb, he was sent by the global leader of his group to establish *Hizb ut-Tahrir* in Pakistan. In the year 2000 he was sent to Denmark to create the Danish-Pakistani wing of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*. In April 2002, whilst in Egypt, his international activities eventually caught up with me. His house was raided and he was taken to underground torture facilities in Cairo. Eventually, he was convicted to five years in prison for his membership to the group. In May 2007, after having served on both their secret national leadership committee and their national executive committee, he resigned from his membership of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and renounced Islamism as an anathema to Islam.

### **2.1.1 Question & Answer Session:**

Straight away after Maajid Nawaz finished his life history he was struck by a series of question from every corner of the open house.

A student from Azad Jammu & Kashmir said that while discussion on extremism its causes have not been discussed. He gave an example of Kashmiri people from both sides, which have been killing each other for decades and now as a result of that hatred they have been become extremists, as the drive to take revenge will always remain within them. Therefore he enquired if Quilliam could pressurise the governments of Pakistan and India to set free that extreme dislike for each other and their disputes for the liberation of Kashmiri people.

In the same way a *Pashtun* student asked if the cause of extremism in Pakistan is from within the nation, as this matter has not been discussed in Maajid Nawaz's speech. He also talked not in favour of the Pakistan army as according to him it's the Army which is promoting the *Jihadists* as their product inside the country.

Similarly a *Baloach* student leader said that these extremist groups, which are considered to be a minority, are actually not in majority infect, as the Army and intelligence agencies are training and recruiting underprivileged people in the name of *Jihad*.

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<sup>1</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir (Arabic: **حزب التحرير** English: Party of Liberation) is an international pan-Islamist, Sunni, vanguard political party whose goal is to combine all Muslim countries in a unitary Islamic state or caliphate, ruled by Islamic law and with a caliph head of state elected by Muslims.

A *Sindhi* student said that his province 'Sindh' has never been *buniyad parast* (fundamentalist). The *Sindhis* have always been promoting a noninterventionist and moderate version of Islam, *Sufism*<sup>2</sup>. In the province a *Mandir* (Hindu shrine) and *Masjid* (mosque) have always been in close proximity. On the whole his point was that with this overall label of a religiously extremist country on Pakistan is diminishing the true identity of *Sindhis*'.

On the other hand after listening to Maajid Nawaz, JIT's representative expressed that it seems that if he is trying to convince the people to change their views on Islam. He further said that they do not want to change their fourteen hundred years of Islamic history and change their vision of Islam according to his (Quilliam's) analysis.

Another *Pashtun* student put forward his view point that despite the fact (according to research) 'drone attacks' are most effective for targeting the terrorists, yet until now they have been in vain, as so far they have killed a large number of innocent civilians and only a very few terrorists. He added that we need to talk about State's policies on crucial matters like this. He said that by simply using the name of Islam are religious extremes it a conspiracy to kill *Pashtoons*. Due to this external war only *Pashtoons* are being slaughtered on daily basis.

In response to all these questions Mr. Nawz said that he and his organisation (Quilliam Foundation) are in a modest position to pressurise the governments and for that matter they are repeatedly in touch with US State Department and British authorities. As Islam is not at an extremist religion but what he was doing earlier was an extreme so they are trying the best they could do to differentiate in Islam and Islamism.

He admitted that various governments have been involved in financing the extremist to take advantage of them as their desired schemes and he strongly condemned the funding to extremists. However he said that it is us, the locals who provide a market for such extremist funding, as it is very easy to exploit ordinary people in the name of religion. Furthermore he said that we the people of Pakistan have to understand the true meaning of Islam and stop joining these extremist groups for the sake of *Jihad* and fanaticism. He quoted that 'all extremist are angry but all angry are not extremists'. So we have to start taking control of our anger and resentment because throughout the course of history religion has been used as slogan to spread violence.

Adding to this he said that a true Muslim could never forget his history; it is the Islamists who have ignored their history. He advised students not to assume anything without conducting a proper research. He said that putting a charge on someone with a supposition that one has not done anything, without knowing the facts is a very poor practice. Also he also said that accusing others that do not have done something is against the teachings of Islam and *Sunnah*. There should always be a civilised discussion on such sensitive issues and for that matter he also appreciated a student who talked about the US drone attacks. He said that he respect his opinion and appreciated that he has researched and read about the problem and this is the whole point. He appreciated the *Pashtoon* student for being polite and considering the debate as a 'Political Debate' and just not saying that you have become a non-believer or *kafir* without considering the other point of view. Therefore according to him if we need to convince others we need to come

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<sup>2</sup> Sufism is a mystical movement within Islam that seeks to find divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God. It consists of a variety of mystical paths that are designed to ascertain the nature of mankind and God and to facilitate the experience of divine love and wisdom in the world.

up with proper research and statistics in a scientific method, as only this will lead towards development.

Later bearing in mind the concerns of many participating students had about the causes of extremism he said that yes we acknowledge that every extremist activity has a cause. However it is incorrect and ignorant of us to say that it is only one thing that has caused all the extremism in Pakistan. It's just not government (policies), or extremists (agendas), or just poverty, or lack of education, so it's a mixture of all of these things. We have to realise that it's very complicated problem. Accordingly we have to address all of them simultaneously, considering different occupation and ideologies. He said that it's just not the poor who are extremists and there he gave an example of Osama Bin Laden who came from one of the richest families in Saudi Arabia along with the best education. He ended his discussion while saying that we need to think of a solution for all the causes of extremism in a much systematic manner and just not for one but for all of them concurrently.

### **2.1.2 Concluding Remarks by Muhammad Tehseen**

After listening Maajid Nawaz's speech on his life history and the whole open house discussion on extremism, Mr. Muhammed Tehseen (Executive Director, SAP), who was Chairing the session gave his concluding thoughts.

First of all he welcomed all the participants both from outside Lahore and the locals. Secondly he thanked BARGAD as they tend to gather youth leadership on such serious and sensitive issues, which is rare to be seen in Pakistan. Youth and specially the students hardly get an opportunity to sit and talk with each other and share their views. Furthermore he appreciated the decorum of the conference where participants are in discussion on a very delicate issue in a well organised manner and depicting a democratic notion.

Then he addressed Maajid Nawaz and told him that he is privileged to listen to his life story. However he told him that very truthfully he did not feel much for what he has been through his life, as if he would have been in Pakistan, then the misery which he went through is nothing compared to agony being faced by average Pakistani. He said that the youth and students here in Pakistan have seen such incomparable desolations during the different 'Marshall Laws'. Adding to this he said that students are not only suffering in *Pashtoonkha*, *Baluchistan* and *Sindh* but also in different areas of *Punjab*, they have to face the same denial by the society. The society has been transformed into such a shape, where we have forgotten to love and respect different colours of skin. He said it's a society where we have set free the democratic discourse from our very nature. So the young students living in such a society, it's conceivable that how deprived they could be.

He continued that if Maajid Nawaz had to face racism in UK in that case the society here in Pakistan discriminates in such a manner, and at various levels, that is beyond anyone's belief. In our society it's a curse to be a woman; it's a curse to belong to a province with less population, its curse to be less educated and what's more even to be a respectable Muslim is also a curse. As a result such varied kind of discrimination in Pakistan comes across in a much severe manner. Therefore in a society with all these five oversized evils and where we just do not care for each other because of dissimilarities in language and skin colour, along with tyranny of ideology, extremism seems to be a minute issue.

Regarding extremism he said, he agrees with in-house discussions that there is not a single factor responsible for it in Pakistan, in fact all of us are responsible for this. We all have adopted that tyranny ideology within ourselves and think that everyone is flawed apart from us. He mentioned that we have overlooked the fact that a human being can also be respected without a given reason.

Soon after he notified that the whole issue is how we define our society and state. Since the concept of a nation-state is being questioned all over the world these days, that whether this concept is relevant enough or not. Seventy five years back, we brought in the constant of a nation-state from Europeans but now we have to think that how useful this constant has remained, because the ones who gave the concept are now sitting holistically as a European Union.

We need to consider that, in our society, what it is actually that we are striving for. Is it poverty, is it education or other similar issues and if so then the question arises that in a society like Pakistan how relevant it is to have a discussion on Islam and Islamism. He said that in *Sindh* and *Baluchistan* the issues of being Islamic and Islamism hardly exist. With God's blessings ninety six percent of Pakistan's population is Muslim and therefore it is not necessary to discuss Islam here and we are very clear that religion has nothing to do with state. Thus he wants to leave this question for the student leaders to think that how applicable is this debate to be continued inside Pakistan's borders.

He carried on that despite of our all false thoughts in recent times a general consensus was being developed, no matter how much oppressed the women; after all they are human beings. Next to this another consensus that electoral politics and parliament are significant had never been questioned, as all religious parties have seats in the parliament and have always supported the parliamentary democracy. However both of these basic consensuses are now being questioned in the context of *Sufi Muhammad Phenomenon* and that a woman can only go out of her house for pilgrimage which has led the country and our society to step backwards.

Link to this he said that in our country the minorities are in a worst situation. These are just not the religious minorities but also based on cultural and ethnical differences. However the ill condition of religious minorities despite of being equal citizens of this country is something which young student leaders must consider while they are debating the whole issue of peacebuilding and peaceful campuses in the country. He said the student leaders who are sitting here in the conference should consider themselves as privileged ones as they are part of only two percent who reaches university level. They have all the luxuries, they like it or not. So they should always consider and feel for the remaining ninety eight percent of their fellow youngsters.

Lastly he said, he has a problem with declaring Urdu as *Quami* (national) language, as it is only a language for communication (the house gave a round of applause on his this statement). We need to break these biased constants of national language, national sports and national army. He believed that young participants can have a luxury to debate, experiment and learn from their mistakes. They can experiment with all those constants largely given by the state.

At the end he once again congratulated and thanked the participants for being here in the conference. He said that he feel happy that in a city like Lahore there are *Pashtoons*, *Sindhis*, *Balochis* and *Kashmiris*, all sitting together. He suspected that even though a huge identity crisis is visible across the country but still the convincing thing to do is that, whether a poor human being living in distant areas of this country could avail the resources of the land she/he is

standing on. In addition he encouraged the students to carry on with debates like this without hurting others and passing judgments.

## **2.2 Debate Session**

Next session aimed to debate on a very critical question, “*Main cause of religious extremism in Pakistan – internal or external factors*”, being asked in Pakistan presently. In the beginning of the session Ms. Salma Butt, briefed the format of the session to the participants. There were two panellists, Imran Khan and Rab Nawaz from Quaid-i-Azam University and Punjab University respectively, debated in favour of the internal factors. Whereas Abdul Basit from Islami Jamiat Talaba and Ishrat Saadat from University Student Federation put forward their views claiming that the religious extremism is due to external factors. After each speech Mr. Maajid Nawaaz asked two questions each from each participant followed by an open house discussion.

Accordingly Imran Khan from Quaid-i-Azam University started the session formally by sharing his views that it’s the internal factors that are causing religious extremism in Pakistan. He said to impose an ideology or a belief on others in the name of religion, even with a use of force if needed, is religious extremism. A few of his point which he made during the speech are as follows:

- § There are three elements that are responsible for religious extremism in Pakistan (i) The State, (ii) Pakistan Army and (iii) we all as a Nation.
- § Religious Extremism inflamed during the Zia era when the state backed drastic activities, for their political reasons. Whilst teaching infantile students ultra conservative *wahabism* in *Madrassahs* which lead them to extremism.
- § At that time over thousands of youngsters were intensely trained inside *Jihadi* camps in N.W.F.P, Kashmir and FATA regions.
- § Likewise, Pakistani Army’s concept of strategic depth has always been of the belief that *Jihadis* play a vital role for the defence of Pakistan.
- § Later he said we the people of Pakistan are equally responsible for endorsing this extremism, as when the state and Army were promoting this religious extremism in the country did we raise a voice against the establishment. Similarly there was no protest from the civil society against these dreadful acts by the establishment.
- § Consequently with lack of any resistance the state and forces kept on encouraging these extremist factions and fanatic groups like *Sipa-e-Sahba* and *Laskr-e-Jhangvi* became more and more powerful and shed blood of our own Muslim brothers.
- § Moreover there are imperfections in our political; social; economic and educational systems. They are based on the notions of maltreatment and exploitation. And Pakistan’s society faces a serious issue of social stratification, where the class differences exist.
- § So beside state and Army’s role we should also take into account all of these socio-political matters. We need to admit that we as a the-social-order of the nation, we have never struggled to implement a political; economic and education system based on justice. And this vacuum continued to increase with our lack of criticism towards the authorities.

Questions from Maajid Nawaz:

- ◌ If we always keep blaming Pakistanis for everything and keep looking down upon us, then how can we reclaim our dignity?
- ◌ Poverty in Pakistan is because it's been deprived from economic development and colonial and capitalist policies, so if we didn't have poverty then we didn't have extremism? So we have to address capitalist exploitation.

Answers:

- ◌ Mr. Khan in reply to the first question said, we have a mind-set in this country that always to blame the West for our internal problems. We do not have a tendency towards self-criticism. He said the focus is on the 'main cause for extremism', so even though a foreign policy of any country is dependable on external and international politics but still the foremost responsibility is of us. As we let ourselves to be used by the West, and that was because we were weak from inside. If we were strong and united internally and less dependent on West for economic development, then we would not have been contaminated externally.
- ◌ Responding the second question Imran Khan said that during the course of history powerful nations were never colonised and since we were disunited, the East India Company took advantage and took away our sovereignty. Even till now this lack of unity amongst us is always providing an option to the external forces to dominate us. What is more, we acquire our economic strategies from institutions like IMF and World Bank, which in return then dictate us their desired course of actions.

Next speaker was Ms. Ishrat Saadat from University Student Federation, who talked in favour of external factors. Highlights of her speech are as below:

- § She started with this statement, "If you are with us, you are our friend otherwise you are our enemy". She said this is not our (Pakistanis) statement, infect it is a statement from the West which has caused so dreadful conditions in our country, that today we are encountered by extremism.
- § According to her the term 'extremism' is an incorrect term as when in literature '*ism*' is used it is based on some concrete theory, culture and slogans but if some actions are forced on a nation in the name of extremism then it's an agenda.
- § Fundamentalist Islam, Radical Islam, Political Islam and Extremist Islam are all the words from the books written by different authors in West. US needed something as a fuel to carry on with their injurious interests and adverse agenda so they used Islam as a fuel.
- § If look at our history, the terms extremism and extremist activities were never seen or heard of, during the *Mughal* era, *Jinnah's* period and even after independence till 1979. All the *Madrassahs* were free fanaticism and there was hardly any Muslim who could be considered as a shame for the entire nation.
- § It is US which in order to take revenge of the lost Vietnam War, intervened into our state and national affairs. Furthermore it used our establishments with shrewd schemes to put

aside religious clergy, disunite the Muslims and embedded extremist activities in the country.

Questions from Maajid Nawaz:

- ◌ At the end of Ms. Saadat's speech, Mr. Nawaz asked that if the term '*ism*' is not in literature the what about all that *Jihadi* literature. In which *Fatwa*'s are given against the killing of non-Muslims and how to cut throats of the non-believers.

Answers:

- ◌ Ms. Saadat responded that it's a scientific rule that every action has a reaction, and of the same extreme. So the same goes for extremism, e.g. if you impose intense agendas on a society then the reaction would come in various forms. The system of revenge prevails in our tribal areas, besides they consider their weapons as their ornaments, so to exploit such folks if a few forces give any *Fatwas*, then it can't be said true for the entire nation and its rest of population and similarly such *Fatwas* cannot be denoted as extremism literature.

Then the third speaker Mr. Rab Nawaz from Punjab University came forward to express his thoughts in favour of external causes for extremism in Pakistan. He said:

- § He started with Ishrat Saadst's point on history where she quoted the examples of *Mughal* and *Jinnah* eras, he said, that yes there used to no extremism during those time periods and Muslims and Hindus used to live together in the sub-continent since centuries. However the phenomenon started to evolve when the 'Two Nation Theory' was misinterpreted with Islamic system. Two nation Theory was based upon the political, social and economic rights of the Muslims living in sun-continent, but it was forcefully integrated with Islam in the course of 'Objectives Resolution'. He supported his argument by saying that not a single representative of Minority groups passed this resolution in the constituent assembly. Similarly all the laws were then passed on the basis of controversial 'Objectives Resolution', by considering Islam as an integral part of the resolution. So the origin of Pakistan was set upon the foundations of fundamentalism.
- § This biased origin of the nation legitimates the fundamentalism within the country. Therefore for example, to talk about *Jihad*, in whichever sense appeared to be true. The softer and brighter side of Islam, which teaches moderation and tolerance, remained neglected collectively and the state with all its intentions promoted only one and very particular interpretation of Islam, the *Jihadi* side.
- § He further made a point that we neglected Quiad-i-Azam's speech on August 11, 1947, in which he said that a Muslim will not remain a Muslim and a Hindu not a Hindu. He meant that not in the sense of their beliefs but on the basis of his/her political will and citizenship. Quiad also said that you may belong to any religion or sect of a religion but this does not has to do anything with state affairs.
- § In addition what awful happened to us was that our ruling class had its own socio-economic interests, and against those interests particular political force used religious extremists against that ruling class in order to weaken it.

- § On the other hand in reality sub-continent's Islamic culture was fairly tolerant and *Sufis* like *Bullay Shah*, *Shah Hussain*, *Baba Farid* and *Waris Shah*, by the side of their poetry and teachings impressed people to convert into Islam. But we ignored them and promoted a strict *Saudi Wahabi* culture, to the extent of our text books, syllabus and into the slogans of Pakistan Army's.
- § Lastly he quoted a saying of a famous historian that "A civilisation cannot be destroyed, unless it is destroyed from within".

Questions from Maajid Nawaz:

- ō Maajid Nawaz asked the participant that while mentioning the point on Two Nation Theory, if he is denying the creation of Pakistan and should Muslims have been left in India to be slaughtered?

Answers:

- ō Rab Nawaz responded that he is not at all denying the creation of Pakistan, as he said his point on Two Nation Theory was that: it was a theory based on nation's social and political rights and not a theory based on Islam. It never meant that an Islamic based system should be imposed in Pakistan, infact it signified that Muslims living in the sub-continent, who are suppressed in the fields of education and occupation should have a land and liberty where they could carry out progress in these fields.

The last speaker Mr. Abdul Basit from Islami Jamiat Talaba argued that religious extremism is a cause of external factors. His arguments are stated below:

- § He said though he agrees with his opponents that if we are weak internally, then outside powers have a greater chance to suppress us. He said the bases of extremism are biased policies from the West that have been imposed upon us.
- § If some cartoons and blaspheme sentences are published in a Denmark's news paper then it is considered to freedom of expression but to write something on 'The Holocaust' is strictly prohibited within the same newspaper.
- § Furthermore where people talks about the promotion of Nazism in Germany by Hitler, they forget that who started the Crusades.
- § According to him we do have an element of tolerance within us but violence was integrated in us from outside. Secondly he said that who has decided that the term 'religious extremism' in an accurate term. So he agrees with the term extremism but said there is no such term as religious extremism.
- § Lastly he pointed no matter one has white skin or black skin if ideas and factors would be against tolerance then they will cause extremism.

Questions from Maajid Nawaz:

- ō Maajid Nawaz asked Mr. Basit, as he mentioned in his speech that his opponents did not studied properly and had a thorough knowledge on the matter of Islam and theory and speeches of the founders of Pakistan, so is it an assumption or he has enquired about it from his opponents?

Answers:

- He replied that it was not an assumption and lack of literary knowledge was depicted through the speeches of his opponents. Secondly he mentioned as far as he is equally participating so he would definitely give them a suggestion for suitable references and thorough readings.

**2.2.1 Open House Discussion:**

Immediately after the speeches house was set open by the moderator for general discussion, that are external or internal factors causing the religious extremism in Pakistan.

- A student from Kashmir raised a point that in 1947 when Kashmir's Dogra Raj did not recognise the Muslim majority and their will to be a part of Pakistan, then against this action a very strong reaction emerged. So if an action is not prevented then the reaction could never be brought to an end. He also said that despite the fact that UN has passed a resolution to restore Kashmir's issue, nothing has been done and is all because of external factors and forces are involved. Rab Nawaz addressed this question and said that if the state of Pakistan is involved in such acts then it is not an external factor but an internal one. Secondly he said the issue of Kashmir is an issue of rights violation and a political issue, so it is unfair to consider it as a religious issue. Similarly in response to the same question Imran Khan said that the best way to resolve the issue to start movements against the violation of Kashmiri's rights. Killing of 'Pandits' and steering it towards religious extremism would never help the people of Kashmir to achieve their goals. He said there should always be a difference between the ones who spread violence and us. If we also adopt same attitude as them then what would be the difference. So the most effective way out from Western interference is criticism, dialogue and demonstrations.
- One *Baluchi* student questioned the speakers who were in favour of external factors, that whenever the *Baluchis* start demanding for their rights, the state introduces religious extremism kind of irrelevant issues within the people to restrain them. He gave an example that very recently in order to divert the attention of the people in *Baluchistan* from their demands the state stir up a trouble in the name of *Tehrek-e-Taliban Baluchistan* to counter this *Baluch Tehrek*. So his question was, isn't it a state's internal policy and isn't this to be considered as an internal factor leading towards extremism? Mr. Abdul Basit from Islami Jamiat Talaba replied to this question and said that first of all *Baluchis* should never consider them alone in movement for their rights, as *Punjabis*, *Sindhis* and all others are evenly with them. Then he said the prevalent proof for extremism are the suicide bomb attacks, however previous to the US attacks within Pakistani territory such attacks never used to occur in the country. Besides he said, we all are against the diversion from *Baluchis* rights to a religious or extremist segment. But still we argue that it is the dictation from the West which is responsible in enhancement of extremism in Pakistan.
- A different student point out towards 'imperialism agenda' and said that the exploitation and spreading fundamentalism are on basis of this agenda. He further said that after the Afghan-Russian war the ISI who was behind the *Jihadis* had huge interests in the black economy of Afghanistan. Therefore we need to understand that there are economic

interests involved for whom the internal factors have been sustaining the extremism and fundamentalism within the country.

- Another student from Baluchistan, shared his views on internal and external factors by saying that if foreign elements are strongly involved to flare extremism in the country, it is point to be pondered whether we, the peoples and authorities of Pakistan are so vulnerable that we allow them to exercise their agenda successfully. There are other Muslim countries as well, specially looking around at our neighbouring country Iran where no external element has ever been noted to intervene their internal affairs and spread their agenda likewise.

### **2.3 Ed Hussain's Session on History of Islamism:**

The last session of the day was a presentation by Ed Hussain (Co-Director and co-founder of Quilliam, also the celebrated author of 'The Islamist') on History of Islamism. He started with a brief history of himself and Quilliam Foundation. His introduction was followed by a presentation on a history of Islamist movements, and how their ideas were formulated and contributed to contemporary Jihadist discourse.

In his presentation he in a few words he discussed Syed Abul ala Mawdudi, Syed Qutb, Saudi Arabia: Islamism, Wahabism, (Takfiri) Jihadism and Afghanistan: the Mujahideen and the birth of Al Qaeda and The spread of Islamist ideology: 9/11.

Later on during the open house discussion a little communication gap was noticed as Ed Hussain could hardly speak or understand Urdu and mostly the question from the participants were in Urdu criticising about his knowledge on the history of Islamism and that his presentation lacked strong verifications and evidences.

Similarly one student pointed out that Ed Hussain has only specified all the negative points or the ones which depict extremism. So a suggestion came forward why not to show the positive side of Islam and its history for the awareness of the students. So in future they could learn and enhance their knowledge of Islam and politics.