

Women in Islamist Terrorism in Pakistan

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Abstract

Women have been playing roles in different capacities while being part of terrorist organizations across the world. This study points out the current trends of women's involvement while analysing different roles they play in perpetrating acts of terrorism. The cases discussed in this article were selected to provide an insight into women and terrorism in Pakistan. Examining such roles would allow researchers and policy makers to devise strategies and formulate guidelines for a counter violent extremist framework.

Key terms: Women, Islamic Terrorism, Pakistan, Women's role in terrorism

Introduction

Involvement of women in terrorism is as old as the advent of modern terrorism, starting by the end of 19th century. Women played some crucial roles in all four waves of terrorism as elucidated by David Rappoport. It is apparent that women continue to play some part in terrorism incidents in the current wave i.e. the religious one. The earliest terrorist organizations of the modern terrorism era had held women in decision making positions and were part of the high command. Vera Figner of Noradnaya Volya (People's Will) is still remembered for introducing revolutionary terrorism in Czarist Russia. Figner led the organization and masterminded the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881.

During the anti-colonial movements, the tactic of terrorism was widely used by terrorist organizations in Ireland, Vietnam, Algeria and elsewhere. Women played minor and supportive roles in those terrorist campaigns.

Algerian FLN (National Liberation Front) had women amongst its ranks and played substantial roles in planting bombs in cafes frequented by Europeans in Algiers and Oran during early 1960s. The rise of the left wing terrorism during 1970s and 1980s once again brought women in terrorism. The European terrorist organizations Red Army Faction (RAF), Communist Combatant Cells (CCC) and Red Brigades had scores of women in their ranks and at high level positions. It is pertinent to mention here that RAF, as the terrorist organization, was co-founded by Ulrike Meinhoff and Gudrun Ensslin, two key leaders of the organization who perpetrated scores of terrorist attacks across West Germany in 1970s. Peruvian women of Andean-Indian origin played major roles in Shining Path. The Central Committee of the militant organization had at least eight women. Around 40 percent of Shining Path militants were women¹.

The rise of Islamist terrorism after the end of Cold War in 1991 paved the way for establishment of domestic, regional and global Islamist terrorist organization in five continents. Unlike previous eras and waves of terrorism (as postulated by David Rappaport) no Islamist terrorist organization has allowed women to play substantial role; though women have remained part of the organizations at a peripheral level.

Literature Review

A number of studies have been conducted in this connection to figure out the issue of growing Islamist extremism among Pakistani youth. At government level, the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), an organization established in 2008 to formulate counter terrorism and

¹ Nathaniel C Nash, "Lima Journal; Shining Path Women: So many and so Ferocious", *New York Times*, September 22, 1992.

counter violent extremism strategies, devised National Counter Extremist Policy Guidelines comprising of six pillars including Rule of Law and Service Delivery, Peoples Engagement, Media Involvement, Integrated Education Reforms, Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Renunciation Programs. NACTA also worked on National Narrative but this endeavor has not yet been approved by the federal government. Another initiative by NACTA in connection with CVE measures is media and youth engagement programs, promotion of cultural activities for countering violent extremism and coordinating efforts with provinces and madrasas boards for the mainstreaming of religious seminaries in Pakistan.

As far as research on the subject matter is concerned, a number of scholars and researchers have studied the topic. In his work on youth radicalization in Pakistan, Moeed Yusuf identified enablers such as education because of change of curricula during the Islamization Process under General Zia ul Haq's military rule (1977-88). Text books were used as conscious efforts to promote Islamist ideology. Madrasahs were also provided with funds and a mushroom growth of religious seminaries was allowed to take root. Subjects, such as Islamic and Pakistan studies, were used for indoctrination while eulogizing the concepts of militant jihad against a neighbouring country. The curricula were even inserted with texts inciting religious and sectarian violence. Yusuf also extensively discussed socio-economic deprivation as an enabler but debunked it as many militants and radicalized youth are from affluent backgrounds. He identified overarching

politico-ideological environment as the principal connector where the state fails to demobilize its resources and plug alternatives².

Prominent author and researcher, Dr Ayesha Siddiqa, in her study ‘Red Hot Chili Pepper Islam’ analyzed whether better education and access to resources made any different thinking patterns as far as the issue of Islamist radicalization is concerned. She concluded that youth responded to popular opinions expressed through the media or on the basis of inherited bias; and those respondents from affluent backgrounds showcased thought patterns close to bordering on radicalization. Her study presented that Pakistani youth from well-off socio-economic background appear to fluctuate between being socio-culturally liberal; having closed approach in matters pertaining to geo-politics, geo-strategy and identity politics³.

In his study on drivers of radicalization while using life stories model, Farhan Zahid interviewed former militants (*jihadis*) and analyzed that many considered *jihad* as idealism but they soon get disillusioned. Religion was used as a Club Model and *jihadis* experienced peer-pressure in signing in for *jihad*. Madrasas may not directly send individuals for *jihad*, but can help radicalize individuals by providing students with an environment where they can meet people. College-going students are eager to pursue war, if their area is somehow connected to the area of fighting, such as Indian occupied Kashmir (IoK). Bad economic conditions of family too can force individuals end up in circumstances

² Moeed Yusuf, “Radicalism Among Youth in Pakistan: Human Development Gone Wrong?”, *Pakistan National Human Development Report (NHDR) 2015, United National Development Pakistan (UNDP)*, November 2014.

³ Aisha Siddiqa, “Red Hot Chili Pepper Islam—Is the Youth in Elite Universities in Pakistan Radical?” *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, September 15, 2010.

where they are wooed by the *jihad* ideology. Education is no guarantee that individual would not join *jihad*⁴.

In a similar vein, Iram Khalid and Mina Ehsan Leghari (2014) studied the phenomenon of radicalization in southern districts of Punjab province. They observed the focus of youth towards religious and radical organizations in southern districts of Punjab, a considerably alarming occurrence. They also found South Punjab as the centre of radical activities of Islamist extremist groups. According to authors, the groups are highly manipulative and capitalizing on economic and underdevelopment issues prevailing in southern Punjab⁵.

Women in Terrorism in Pakistan

With the commencement of Global War on Terror (GWOT), a plethora of Islamist terrorist organizations turned against the state amid the state's response of joining the US-led alliance against Al-Qaeda based in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Islamist terrorist organizations of various sorts such as Islamist Kashmiri, sectarian, and Afghan *jihad* veterans had worked with Al-Qaeda and developed a close bond during Afghan Taliban period (1996-2001) as Afghan Taliban regime welcomed all Islamist terrorist groups even those proscribed in Pakistan. A number of Islamist terrorist groups sent their militants to receive training at camps outsourced by Afghan Taliban to Al-Qaeda. Elements from Harkat ul Mujahideen (HuM), Harkat ul Jihad-e-Islami (HuJI), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and

⁴Farhan Zahid, "Choosing the Path of Islamist Extremism: Case Studies from Pakistan", Research Paper, *Sustainable Development Policy Institute*, October 2018, <https://sdpi.org/publications/files/Choosing-the-Path-of-Islamist-Extremism-Case-Studies-from-Pakistan.pdf>.

⁵ Iram Khalid and Mina Ehsan Leghari, "Radicalization of Youth in Southern Punjab", *Journal of South Asian Studies* 29, No. 2 (July-December, 2014): 537-551.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) had been to Afghanistan and worked closely with Afghan Taliban during their fight against Northern Alliance forces in eastern and northern parts of the country. Most of these groups fought under the umbrella of Brigade-055, an Al-Qaeda auxiliary, during the invasion of Mazar-e-Sharif and other battles against Northern Alliance.

The situation changed after the fall of Afghan Taliban regime and the Islamist militant groups moved to Pakistan where they helped Al-Qaeda's on-the-run high profile leaders to find safe havens. The role of women had started to develop during this period as we see how the Islamist terrorist organizations in collusion with likeminded Islamist political parties of Pakistan provided safe shelters to Al-Qaeda rank and file.

Female students of Jamia Hafsa (linked with Red Mosque in Islamabad) played a central role before the situation had worsened and finally culminated in a special forces' operation against the Islamist militants hiding inside the Red Mosque in July 2007. Later, a number of Jamia Hafsa female students pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Emir of Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), in a video statement released in 2014. A number of other cases have emerged in which women rendered support in both active and passive manners.

Raison d'être of this research

The primary reason of this research is to examine the role of women from the counter violent extremism perspective. Women, in developing countries, play a crucial role of active parenting and character and personality development of children. Terrorist organizations are also part of the same society and have a fair idea about the significance of women's

role in parenting in development of a particular mind-set. Hence, it is imperative to study the current trends of women radicalization which is eventually paving the way for some women to play a part in terrorism. Examining such roles would allow researchers and policy makers to devise strategies and formulate mechanisms for a counter violent extremist framework.

Methodology

The research is based upon qualitative analyses of existing data on women in terrorism in Pakistan, taking multiple case studies into account, interviews, examining magazines of Islamist terrorist organizations' women wing, and newspapers for collection of data on terrorist incidents involving women.

The study relies on primary sources i.e. the books, articles and papers written and published by the *jihadi* organizations and ideologues. Some interviews were also conducted with former members of *jihadi* organizations in Pakistan, hence becoming the secondary sources for the research. Moreover, discussions with prominent scholars, researchers, and experts were also arranged to better understand the ideological concepts presented by the *jihadi* ideologues in Pakistan.

Women in Terrorism in Pakistan: Roles and Levels of Participation

The case of Pakistan is interesting in a sense that a number of local and global Islamist terrorist organizations operating in the country have been able to utilize females as human resource and allow radicalized and like-minded women to play some levels of roles in supportive, logistics, planning and master-minding acts of terrorism in the country. The roles

played by women associated with Islamist terrorist groups can be divided into three major categories:

- Active roles in planning, and perpetrating acts of terrorism in Pakistan
- Individual roles while remaining in touch with the Islamist terrorist organizations such as providing shelter and logistics to on-the-run high profile terrorists
- Women involved at institutional levels in proselytizing especially where selective political organizations somehow train and indoctrinate female students and workers to play their supportive roles as wives, daughters, and sisters of *jihadis*, and most importantly rearing children to become *jihadis*.

In Support Roles

A number of women members of Islamist political party Jamaat-e-Islami remained active in providing safe refuge to Al-Qaeda militants. These women were aided by their male family members but at times the women came forward and played crucial roles. For example, in Karachi women members of Jamaat-e-Islami received dead bodies of Al-Qaeda militants killed in police encounters and managed their burial in local graveyards⁶. Women also facilitated the transfer of families of Al-Qaeda leaders and rank and file to safe locations and at times to their home countries. Legal help was also arranged by women to incarcerated Al-Qaeda prisoners.

An important case in this regard is the arrest of two high value Al-Qaeda commanders from the house of Sabiha Shahid, the wife of Shahid Ali

⁶ Islamabad based senior journalist, interviewed by author, April, 2019.

Khan, the former captain and goalkeeper of National Hockey team of Pakistan in 2002, from the suburbs of Karachi. Sabiha was an active member of Jamaat-e-Islami's women wing in Karachi. The arrests were considered breakthrough in leading towards the eventual arrest of the 9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaikh Mohammad (KSM) in 2003 from Rawalpindi. The militants were arrested by law enforcement agencies after a severe two-hour long gun battle in which both sides fiercely fought in the wee hours of the morning. Though the family of hockey player was arrested but released later because of unknown reasons. According to one account, the third militant, though injured in the crossfire, somehow managed to escape the scene⁷.

Another incident indicating the support role of women in sheltering Al-Qaeda's on-the-run leaders was of Farzana Abdul Qudoos. Farzana's name, a district leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, touched the world headlines when the 9/11 mastermind was arrested from her house in Westridge locality of Rawalpindi district of Punjab province, just few miles away from capital Islamabad. Farzana's husband, Abdul Qudoos, was also an active member of Jamaat but could not rise in the ranks as high as his wife. The raid was conducted in the early hours of March 1, and was a joint venture of Pakistani law enforcement and intelligence agencies and Federal Bureau of Investigation. According to Khalid Shaikh Mohammad's biographers, in their book "The Hunt for KSM", the arrest from the house of Farzana was the result of a tip off from US intelligence agencies to their Pakistani counterparts. The apprehension of KSM was a major success in on-going GWOT. Surprisingly, a woman was providing

⁷ Hassan Mansoor, "Two Qaeda Suspects Caught after Gun Battle, One Escapes", *Daily Times*, March 2, 2002.

shelter to the world's most wanted terrorist and a mastermind of a major terrorist attack in the history.

In Active Roles

A number of women have remained active participants of Islamist terrorist organizations in Pakistan. One of the most notorious and world renowned is the case of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui. Dr. Siddiqui belonged to a highly religious family based in Karachi. Her whole family was associated with an Islamist political party, Jamaat-e-Islami⁸. Siddiqui studied at prestigious universities including Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), University of Houston, and Brandeis from where she received her doctorate in neuroscience. Siddiqui was suspected of her involvement in 9/11 attacks because during interrogation, KSM revealed her name as a courier and a financer. She married her second husband, Ammar al-Baluchi, after divorcing the first one on returning to Pakistan immediately after 9/11 attacks.

Her husband, Ammar al-Baluchi, worked closely in procuring toxic materials required for developing Chemical and Biological Weapons (CBW) from black-market for maximizing the fatalities of allied forces in Afghanistan. Finally, she was apprehended by US military in Ghazni province of Afghanistan and later tried in New York and sentenced to 86 years of imprisonment.

⁸ Jamaat-e-Islami is one of the mainstream Islamist political parties in Pakistan. Jamaat was founded by Abul A'la Maududi, a self-taught scholar in 1941. Jamaat has been accused of aligning with Al-Qaeda and not condemning Islamist terrorism in Pakistan. Khalid Shaikh Mohammad (KSM), the mastermind of 9/11 attacks, was arrested from the house of a leader of Jamaat Abdul Qudoos. Besides the arrest of KSM, scores of other Al-Qaeda high value targets have also been arrested from residences of Jamaat leaders and workers in Pakistan.

Another interesting case is of Umme Hassan, wife of militant Islamist cleric Abdul Aziz of Red Mosque of Islamabad. Umme Hassan, whose real name is Majida Younis, is also the principal of Jamia Hafsa, the controversial female seminary located in Islamabad. Hassan played a central role in indoctrinating and instigating Jamia Hafsa students for conducting violent protests in Islamabad and attempted to shut down beauty parlours, massage-centers, and barber and CD shops before the Red Mosque operation, initiated by Special Forces of Pakistani Army in July 2007 in which a total number of 103 people, both militant and Special Forces, were killed.

Hassan delivered lectures and hate-speeches against religious minorities and Shia and *Sufi* sects of Islam and openly propounded her ultra-radical views. She is believed to have radical Islamist views much harsher than her husband, the Imam of Red Mosque. Commenting on Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Peace laureate, Umme Hassan said, "There is some problem with this child. She was not given the proper education. We think this was all a drama to malign Islam. Such conspiracies never work, they just make us stronger." Hassan is open and candid about his praise for Taliban, as she said, "I am proud of the Taliban, because they have brought America and its allies to their knees⁹." Considering the role of 'true' Muslim women, Umme Hassan believes that:

- Muslim women must marry *Mujahedeen*
- Muslim women have a responsibility to raise children in accordance with *Shariah* laws

⁹ Zunaira Zaki, "A Battle for Young Souls from Behind the Veil", ABC News, October 11, 2013.

- The children must be prepared for *jihad* from the beginning and Muslim women bear this very important responsibility
- During times of *jihad* the women must play their role in safeguarding the interests of *Mujahideen* and raise children even if their husband are off to *jihad*¹⁰

In a vengeful manner Hassam instigated female students to lodge protests and students reacted violently and created havoc in the city after the assassination of Emir of *Sipah-e-Sahaba* (anti-Shia organization) in October 2003¹¹. A total of seven people lost their lives in the subsequent violent incidents perpetrated by female students of Jamia Hafsa. They also burnt down a *Sufi* Shrine, police vehicles and a cinema.

In December 2014, a group of female students from Hafsa Mosque pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, self-proclaimed Caliph of Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS). The Hafsa students released a video message¹² supporting the cause of al-Baghdadi and urged Pakistani Islamist militants to join the ranks of ISIS and support the Caliphate. The girls also invited Caliph Abu Bakr to take revenge of Red Mosque operation conducted in 2007¹³.

Umme Hassan endorsed the Hafsa students' decision of supporting ISIS, she said,

“The girls [students] were justified in declaring support for the

¹⁰ Islamabad based journalist who had earlier interviewed Umme Hassan, interviewed by author, October 22, 2017

¹¹ “Azam Tariq Gunned Down in Islamabad”, *Dawn*, October 7, 2003.

¹² TV Monitor Project, “Students At Islamabad's Jamia Hafsa Call To Support ISIS, Avenge The Death of Bin Laden”, *Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI)*, November 25, 2014, <https://www.memri.org/tv/students-islamabads-jamia-hafsa-call-support-isis-avenge-death-bin-laden>.

¹³ Shakeel Qarar, “Report cites Lal Masjid, Jamia Hafsa ‘Waging War’ against the State”, *Dawn*, January 8, 2015.

Islamic State because no one came to their rescue when they were attacked and humiliated in July 2007 by enemies. The female students were not only bewildered but also grief-stricken because their dear ones were brutally killed. The video released by them is a result of that frustration as they seek a saviour, who can assure them of being protected and not being thrashed and humiliated as has been done to them in the past".¹⁴

The case of Tashfeen Malik is another case study of female violent extremism. Though the terrorist attack perpetrated by Tashfeen and her husband did not occur in Pakistan but Tashfeen's radicalization did happen to take place in Pakistan at a religious seminary known as Al-Huda International.

Tashfeen Malik and her husband Syed Rizwan Farooq killed 14 people in a mass shooting at Inland Regional Center for people with developmental disabilities. Tashfeen studied at Al-Huda's Multan branch before getting to her US born husband and moving to the US. The couple pledged allegiance to Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) before the terrorist attack and the ISIS proudly claimed responsibility of the attack. The Al-Bayan radio of ISIS stated, "We pray to God to accept them as martyrs¹⁵". The couple posted their allegiance on Facebook just before the attack.

The most important active role was the creation of Shaheen Force which is to work as Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)'s women wing.

According to a statement released by Umaima Hassan Ahmad, the wife of

¹⁴ "Baghdadi our Caliph and Omar our Ameer", *The News*, December 9, 2014.

¹⁵ Faith Karimi, Jason Hanna and Yousuf Basil, "San Bernardino Shooters 'Supporters' of ISIS, Terror Group says", *CNN International*, December 6, 2015.

Al-Qaeda Emir Ayman al-Zawahiri,

"I advise you to raise your children in the cult of *jihad* and martyrdom and to instil in them a love for religion and death..... each woman would raise her child to be a new Saladin by telling him 'it is you who will restore the grandeur of the Islamic nation and you will liberate Jerusalem' ".¹⁶

Afinda Bint-e-Ayesha is designated as the *Emira* of the force by Umaina who would herself act as a patron. The new all-women force is said to have plans for training 500 female suicide bombers for perpetrating terrorist attacks in Pakistan.¹⁷

Most recent case was of Noreen Leghari, a medical student from Hyderabad, who was cajoled by the ISIS-*Khurasan* online propaganda to join the group. Leghari joined an ISIS Cell based in Lahore, got married to one of the cell members and opted to become a suicide bomber before the cell was busted by law enforcement agencies in 2016.

Institutional Role

The third level of involvement of women in violent extremism in Pakistan is at institutional level i.e. the role of women-only preaching and proselytizing organizations in the promotion of Islamist radical thoughts for violence. These organizations are mostly based in urban centers of Pakistan. This is in fact the most crucial and pivotal support level as most of the above mentioned roles were acted upon by women either as part of these female organizations or somehow associated with them. Such institutions/organizations have means and support for promoting the

¹⁶ "Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's Wife Predicts Muslim Spring", *The Telegraph*, June 8, 2012.

¹⁷ Vicky Nanjappa, "Shaheen Force: Al-Qaeda's New Women's Wing in the Sub-continent", *One India*, February 3, 2015.

Islamist causes and radicalizing young and educated women. These institutions have been working for the last twenty years and alleged to have links with Islamist terrorist groups because of a number of terrorist incidents indicating their involvement.

It is therefore pertinent to discuss some of the cases of female preaching and proselytizing organizations which have been repeatedly accused of radicalizing women in Pakistan.

Jamia Hafsa

As discussed earlier, while elaborating the role of Umme Hassan and her students of Jamia Hafsa, Islamabad, an all-female seminary affiliated with controversial Red Mosque, it is essential to shed light on the role of the institution involved in radicalization of female students. On November 24, 2014, almost four months after the proclamation of Islamic State by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the female students of Jamia Hafsa in a video message pledged allegiance to Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The very act was heavily criticized but endorsed by the management of Jamia Hafsa and the Red Mosque prayer leader Abdul Aziz. The girls of female seminary were previously known for supporting Al-Qaeda and Taliban but their sudden change of *jihadi* patrons was indeed surprising. The spokesperson in the said video openly swore allegiance while stating that,

“We praise Allah, who granted us the Emir of the believers, Mullah Muhammad Omar, and the Caliph of the Muslims, Shaikh Abu Bakr al-Husseini al-Qureshi al-Baghdadi. This is a message from the students of Jamia Hafsa.....We implore all our *Mujahedeen* brothers to unite ranks. Do not heed the propaganda of the infidels

and the hypocrites. Oh Allah, install the Islamic Caliphate regime in Pakistan and everywhere.”¹⁸

The pledge of allegiance clearly demonstrated the institutional role of Jamia Hafsa in setting a new benchmark for future role of women in the *jihadi* landscape of Pakistan. This also allowed ISIS to start playing a new role amid the substantial support base provided by the female students of Jamia Hafsa, sitting in the heart of Islamabad. Maulana Abdul Aziz, the controversial cleric of Red Mosque, stated that he “respects Islamic State because of similarity in their missions and has no repentance over supporting IS”.¹⁹

Female students of Jamia Hafsa are known for their ultra-radical Islamist views and remained actively involved in incidents of violence against police, burning of Sufi Shrine, CD and barber shops and kidnapping of Chinese massage-parlour workers in Islamabad. The support they receive from the institution provides an impetus for their destructive spree and ideological assistance for Islamist terrorist organizations like Afghan Taliban and ISIS.

Al-Huda International

Another female seminary known for disseminating highly provocative material is Al-Huda. Founded by former Jamaat-e-Islami activist Farhat Hashmi in 1994, Al-Huda strives to reinvigorate medieval Islamist ideals, which Al-Huda founder and CEO, Hashmi, considers ‘pure and true Islam’

¹⁸ TV Monitor Project, “Students at Islamabad's Jamia Hafsa Call to Support ISIS, Avenge the Death of Bin Laden”, *Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI)*, November 25, 2014, <https://www.memri.org/tv/students-islamabads-jamia-hafsa-call-support-isis-avenge-death-bin-laden>.

¹⁹ Azam Khan, “No Regret Over Supporting IS, says Lal Masjid cleric”, *Express Tribune*, December 15, 2014,

to women of upper-class and upper-middle class²⁰. Al-Huda promotes a method of teaching and syllabus that seems to impart positive imaging and branding of extremist ideologues. Mostly women are wives, daughters, and sisters of country's business community, bureaucrats, military officers, politicians and judiciary who attend the sessions on regular basis in main cities of Pakistan. Al-Huda's international branches are located in UAE, Canada, US, and UK.

Al-Huda trained girls have remained part of some major terrorist plots in the world. The notorious San Bernardino shooter, Tashfeen Malik, was an Al-Huda graduate. Tashfeen and her husband pledged allegiance to Islamic State's Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi after killing 14 people and injuring another 21 on December 2, 2015 at San Bernardino County in California.²¹ It is also allegedly reported that some of Al-Huda graduates joined global Islamist terrorist organizations such as ISIS. It is not clear how many Al-Huda girls departed for Syria in support of ISIS. At least four Canadian girls of Al-Huda's Mississauga branch left their families to join ISIS in 2015.²².

Lahore based Bushra Cheema and her accomplices' flight to Syria in order to join Da'esh in January 2016 had shocked Pakistani society. Bushra Cheema, Irshad Bibi and Farhana left for Syria with their 12 children, leaving their husbands behind. According to Punjab police sources, all

²⁰ Former Al-Huda student, interviewed by author, Islamabad, October 22, 2017.

²¹ Greg Botelho and Ralph Ellis, "San Bernardino Shooting Investigated as 'Act of Terrorism'", *CNN International*, December 5, 2015.

²² "Four Female Students Who Sought to Join ISIS Attended Mississauga School", *CBC*, December 8, 2015.

three studied at Al-Huda International²³. Bushra left for her husband a two-minute-long voice message, indicating her intentions, “I love God and his religion, and I want to die a martyr’s death. If you can’t join us then at least pray for your wife and children to die in *jihad*”.²⁴

According to Sadaf Ahmad, who wrote her PhD dissertation on Al-Huda, the students are “very intolerant and judgmental toward people who were different from them”.²⁵ The Al-Huda’s raison d’être is to raise a whole new generation of Islamist mothers who inculcate ultra-orthodox Islamist values from the cradle to their children instating a peer group in radical Islamism.

Zikra Academy

Apart from institutional role in radicalization of women in Pakistan, a number of small institutes are also involved in terrorism financing through women. Zikra Academy’s name, a small institute of religious sessions (Dars) for women of influential families, came to surface after the ISIS-linked cell masqueraded 43 Ismaili-Shias in Karachi in 2014 (Safoora Goth carnage). As per police investigations, the women of Zikra Academy were involved in bankrolling the cell. The Academy was established by wife of Khalid Yousaf Bari, a retired engineer of Pakistani International Airlines (PIA), and wife of Adil Masood Butt (owner of College of Accounting and Management Sciences) also involved in financing of Islamist terrorist

²³ Benazir Shah and Rimmel Mohydin, “Punjab Law Minister says Pakistan is Fighting Alongside IS Won’t be Allowed Back Home”, *Newsweek Pakistan*, January 20, 2016.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Khaled Ahmed, “Daughters of Al-Huda”, *Express Tribune*, August 21, 2010.

cell²⁶. The organization had membership of twenty women including wife and mother in-law of Saad Aziz, the militant involved in Safoora Goth tragedy. All of them were from upper-middle class and involved in distributing and disseminating Islamic State videos and literature along with arranging marriages among the group. During their Dars sessions, the fund collection was also done and the amount was handed over to the militants²⁷.

Analysis and discussion

Terrorist groups operate in an iceberg like manner as one could only see the tip of it whereas most of it remains submerged. The terrorist networks operate in a similar fashion as the support network remains underground and at times undetected even after the frontline operators are eliminated or arrested. Women involved in Islamist terrorist are part of that underground, submerged and most of the time undetected network.

Women have remained part and parcel of modern terrorism. There is nothing substantially new with regard to the role of women as far as the case of Pakistan is concerned. At the *jihadi* landscape in the country, women play crucial roles as logistician, financiers, and an active roles in different capacities. Most importantly, all-female proselytizing (*Dawah*) organizations play critical roles not only in indoctrinating women but also in preparing them for would-be wives, sisters, and mothers of *jihadis*.

The cases discussed in this article were selected to provide an insight into women and terrorism in Pakistan. The worrisome aspect is the

²⁶ Faraz Khan, "Assistants of Terror: How Women Raise Funds for Da'ish in Karachi", *Express Tribune*, December 21, 2015.

²⁷ "Police Uncover Women-led Islamic State Fund Raising Network", *News International*, December 22, 2015.

radicalization of women at quite a large scale in Pakistan. Substantial growth of female Islamist institutions and their subsidiaries, acting as conduits of women radicalization, is indeed alarming. Another issue to ponder over is about the *jihadi* mothers. Islamist seminaries such as al-Huda are meant to Islamize and radicalize would-be mothers. The intended target is to raise a new generation of *jihadis* from the very beginning. Other institutions like Jamia Hafsa are endeavouring to broaden the scope and widen the active role of women at *jihadi* landscape of Pakistan. There have been number of known cases where women acted as facilitators, fund raisers, and logisticians of terrorist networks in Pakistan but more of a problematic is the issue of women being radicalized through organized and well-funded institutions.

Conclusion

The issue of growing radicalization in Pakistan is a matter of grave concern irrespective of genders. Female radicalization issue should be given priority as its effects may last decades and would be much more difficult to contain. A concrete reformation drive for madrasas initiative under National Action Plan (NAP) umbrella is something immediately required. Moreover, it is high time for provincial governments to adopt policy measures recommended by NACTA's National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines (NCEPG) which may be implemented in line with execution mechanism as described in the document. Furthermore, the policy makers need to take steps for addressing the issue of female radicalization at all levels in society.

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