

The Nexus of Religious Extremism and Pakhtun Culture: Myths and Realities

Dr. Abdul Qadir Khan (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, UOB, Quetta)

Dr. Adil Zaman (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, UOB, Quetta)

Syed Amir Shah (Lecturer, Department of Political Science, UOB, Quetta)

Abstract:

After the end of cold war, the ascendancy of Taliban in Afghanistan, the rise of religious extremism in frontier regions of Pakistan and Pashtun nationalism has become one of the hotly debated issues. The Pashtun identity, its historical evolution and relationship with religion can be depicted from a statement of Khan Abdul Wali Khan which he gave during 1980s that whether he was a Pashtun first, a Pakistani or a Muslim. His famous reply was that he had been a Pashtun for last three thousand years, a Muslim for thirteen hundred years and a Pakistani for only twenty five years. This statement shows a complicated nature of Pashtun nationalism especially in wake of post 9/11 world, in which a rise of Taliban phenomenon has overshadowed many of its original foundations. Many scholars in the west and from within the country attribute the rise of talibanization in Pashtun society to the culture of Pashtuns. To them, Pashtun culture has many aspects that help promote radical ideas. For example the overwhelming majority of Pashtun population adheres to deobandi school of thought unlike in Punjab which follows brehvi school of thought. Similarly, the rise of talibanization is also cited as an evidence for their claim that Pashtun culture is very conducive for promotion of radical ideas. Thus, these scholars draw close relationship between Pashtun nationalism and talibanization and make them appear as two faces of same coin. However, there are others who approached this issue from a completely different perspective. They try to prove that the two phenomena of Pashtun culture and religious fundamentalism like Talibanization are two completely separate issues which have nothing to do with each other. They resist all those "false notions" that create a link between Pashtun culture, identity and traditions with that of talibanization. This article is an attempt to unpack the contemporary debate by exploring various angles of Pashtun culture in order to understand the true nature of actual debate, and finally come to the conclusion with better understanding of the issue.

Key words: religious extremism, pakhtun culture, myths, realities, Afghanistan, Taliban.