FOSTERING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE THROUGH TRADITIONAL NARRATIVES: PASHTUN FOLKLORE IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Asghar Khan[*]
Zia Ur Rahman[**]

Abstract

This paper explores the significance of folklore in fostering community resilience within Pashtun society as a response to violent extremism and addressing social conflicts. The study aims to illuminate the mechanisms by which folklore, encompassing traditional narratives, oral traditions, and cultural practices, can play a pivotal role in promoting peacebuilding initiatives and empowering local communities in their struggle against terrorism and extremism. To conduct this study, qualitative research methods were employed, involving the collection of both secondary and primary data. Secondary data was acquired through a comprehensive content analysis of folklore and relevant scholarly sources. Primary data was gathered through ethnographic interviews, group discussions, and personal

[*] Asghar Khan is a Senior Lecturer of Political Science and the Chairman of the Department of Regional Studies at the University of Peshawar. He can be contacted at (mian_786pk@yahoo.com)
[**] Zia Ur Rahman is Assistant Professor at the Department of Governance, Politics & Public Policy Abasyn University Peshawar. He can be contacted at (mianzia786@gmail.com)

observations. The findings of this research underscore the substantial contribution of Pashtun folklore to the enhancement of community resilience in countering violent extremism. Recognizing the distinctive role of Pashtun folklore in shaping identities, fostering social cohesion, advancing inclusivity and pluralism, as well as transmitting fundamental values, this paper suggests that policymakers and practitioners can formulate effective strategies to harness this indigenous knowledge system for sustainable conflict resolution.

Keywords: Folklore, Community Resilience, Pashtun Society, Hospitality, Identity, Social Cohesion, Pluralism, Violent Extremism, Culture, Proverb, *Tappa*

Introduction

The Pashtun community, with its 50 million strong population in Pakistan, boasts a rich cultural heritage deeply rooted in Pashto folklore. Throughout history, Pashtun society has displayed remarkable resilience in the face of various challenges, whether natural disasters or man-made crises. The cultural norms of charity, hospitality, and community support services, such as 'Ashar' and 'Lashkar,' have been instrumental in demonstrating this resilience (*Ashar, Lashkar*). However, the region has been severely affected by terrorism and violent extremism, often sponsored by groups like the Taliban and Al Qaeda, particularly during the War on Terror.

Understanding the intricate factors contributing to the rise of violent extremism within the Pashtun community is of utmost importance. Scholarly research predominantly divides into two perspectives. State-centric analyses, which attribute the spread of extremism to political and socio-economic grievances, whereas society-centric perspective, which highlights the role of historical and cultural elements, such as Pashtunwali and tribal governance, in fueling extremism.

Existing literature underscores the necessity for a comprehensive, community-driven approach to building resilience against violent extremism. Recognizing the importance of local voices and cultural expressions, efforts are being made to empower communities in the fight against extremism. Community-based strategies emphasizing engagement, partnerships with civil society organizations, religious leaders, and local stakeholders are pivotal. Folklore, authentic collaborations, educational interventions, and the involvement of religious leaders all play significant roles in fostering community resilience (Stephens et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2020; Ellis & Abdi, 2017; Adnan, 2023; Aly et al., 2014; Ahmed et al., 2021).

Within the Pashtun community, initiatives have been launched to leverage Pashtun folklore and cultural expressions in countering extremist ideologies while promoting positive values. Thus, harnessing the potential of Pashtun folklore and cultural heritage

becomes essential in strengthening community resilience against violent extremism. By encouraging positive values and engaging local voices, policymakers can enhance preventive efforts and cultivate more inclusive and resilient societies.

This research paper thoroughly investigates the significant role of Pashtun folklore in fostering community resilience against violent extremism. Through the utilization of Pashtun folklore, the paper underscores its transformative influence in engaging communities, shaping identities, resolving conflicts, and steadfastly opposing extremist ideologies. The study aims to comprehend how folklore contributes to conflict resolution and the development of community resilience, ultimately fortifying Pashtun society against the pervasive threat of violent extremism. Employing a multidisciplinary research approach, the study concentrates on the efficacy of Pashtun folklore in countering extremist ideologies. Policymakers are strongly encouraged to harness the compelling power of Pashtun folklore through contextually grounded interventions to address the root causes of violence and extremism. This involves embracing local voices, preserving cultural heritage, and empowering community members to actively combat violent extremism, thus fostering resilient societies. In essence, this research paper underscores the paramount significance of Pashtun folklore as an influential tool for nurturing community resilience against violent extremism and

promoting positive values within the dynamic Pashtun community.

Methodology

For this study, a triangulation approach was employed, which involved combining various research methods to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis. These methods included in-depth individual ethnographic interviews, focused group discussions, content analysis of specific folkloric genres (*Tappa*, Pashto couplets, and *Mataluna*, proverbs), and personal observations.

The primary data collection phase encompassed 15 in-depth individual ethnographic interviews, engaging a diverse group of participants including elderly individuals, religious figures, academics, literary figures, and journalists. Given the complex and potentially sensitive context of the Pashtun region, a convenience sampling method was used to select participants, facilitating access to a broad spectrum of perspectives.

Furthermore, to enrich the study with additional insights, three focused group discussions were conducted, involving experts from Peshawar, Mardan, and Malakand. These discussions allowed for a deeper exploration of the subject matter from various angles.

The content analysis of the chosen folklore genres, *Tappa* and *Mataluna* (Proverbs), was a valuable component of the research, providing important thematic and cultural insights.

In addition to these research methods, personal observations were incorporated to complement and reinforce the evidence gathered through the multiple research approaches.

Literature Review

Efforts to prevent violent extremism must extend beyond military and security measures and address underlying issues while building community resilience. Resilient communities can effectively counter recruitment by collaborating with various stakeholders. The European Union (EU) supports global initiatives that focus on education, media capacity building, women's empowerment, and youth engagement. Context-specific solutions emphasize the importance of the rule of law and human rights. In the Pashtun society, recognizing unique circumstances and key actors is essential. Community resilience programs, including the utilization of folklore, should be customized to suit specific societies like the Pashtun context.

Government-sanctioned counter-violent extremism (CVE) programs have been extensively evaluated (Aziz, 2017; Gielen, 2019; Harris-Horgan et al., 2015; Innes et al., 2017), with a growing call for community-driven approaches due to the often

top-down nature of these programs (Odafen, 2019; Hardy, 2018; Aldrich, 2014; Kessels & Nemr, 2016). Recognizing the importance of community resilience, a whole-of-society approach is advocated (Grossman, 2021). This approach involves forming partnerships with local communities and gaining a nuanced understanding of resilience within the context of violent extremism, utilizing theories from public health and disaster recovery. Resilience plays a pivotal role in countering extremism (Nielsen & Schack, 2016; Grossman et al., 2020), as indicated in various policy frameworks. Defined as the ability to rebound from adversity (Mohaupt, 2009), resilience helps societies withstand, prevent, adapt to, and recover from challenges like extremism (Longstaff et al., 2014; Grossman, 2021; Hardy, 2015). According to the social-ecological model, resilience is not just an individual trait but a social process (Hunter, 2012), promoting positive adaptation and transformation at the individual, family, community, and societal levels to counter violent extremism.

Resilience is a central concept in countering violent extremism (CVE). It is crucial to understand local community resilience and the key contributing factors (Edwards, 2016; Jore, 2020; Mirahmadi, 2016; Salyk-Virk, 2018). Community-based practices have proven effective in combating extremism (Wimelius et al., 2018; Grossman et al., 2020; Mirahmadi, 2016). Inclusive networks through multi-faith engagement can counter

extremist narratives (Mandaville & Nozell, 2017; Halafoff & Wright-Neville, 2009).

Folklore plays a significant role in countering violent extremism in Pashtun society by fostering social cohesion, nonviolence, and respect for human rights. Therefore, folklore, genuine partnerships, educational interventions, and the involvement of religious leaders are essential in creating community resilience against violent extremism (Stephens et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2020; Ellis & Abdi, 2017; Adnan, 2023; Aly et al., 2014; Ahmed et al., 2021). Resilient communities prevent their members from being drawn into extremism by fostering a sense of belonging, challenging extremist views, and addressing mechanisms of moral disengagement (Stephens et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2020; Aly et al., 2014). Folklore plays a significant role by strengthening social cohesion, promoting positive values, serving as an educational tool, and providing inspiration (Stephens et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2020). Genuine partnerships with community members, particularly in Muslim American communities, have proven effective in building resilience (Ellis & Abdi, 2017). Education interventions grounded in moral disengagement theory help individuals challenge the influence of violent extremism (Aly et al., 2014). Involving religious leaders and fostering strong bonds within communities contribute to resilience against violent extremism (Adnan, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2021).

Local initiatives like folklore can be crucial tools in strengthening community resilience against violent extremism. Further research is necessary to evaluate their effectiveness in CVE efforts and to support community-led initiatives. Local voices, resources, and cultural practices are vital components of resilience, as is collaboration between secular and religious actors.

Several studies and initiatives have highlighted the potential of folklore in building community resilience and countering violent extremism (Weine et al., 2013; Aly et al., 2014; Aly et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2017). Other works explore the causes of violence and counter-violent strategies (Pearson, 2020; Ahmed et al., 2021; Speckhard et al., 2021; Rehman, 2021; Niemi et al., 2018; Ghosh, 2018; Winter et al., 2020; Mythen & Baillergeau, 2021; Veronika et al., 2020; Mirahmadi et al., 2016; Aslam et al., 2020; Johnson & Mason, 2008). In the context of Pashtun society, numerous works delve into issues related to radicalization, social institutions, identity, and religious ideologies (Khan, 2020; Aslam, 2020; Faheem et al., 2021; Makki, 2022; Kakar, 2022). Moreover, several authors have examined the significance of folklore in community resilience (Kato, 2018; Beel, 2017; Mathivha, 2015; Mphasha, 2015), with scholars like Dr. Safdar Khan, Dr. Zeba Khan, and Dr. Asma Khalid emphasizing the positive role of Pashtun folklore in Pashtun society. Community-centered approaches utilizing Pashtun folklore are gaining popularity in the fight against violent extremism. With a rich

history spanning five millennia, Pashtun folklore plays a vital role in fostering identity, social capital, traditional knowledge, positive values, and constructive dialogue. By countering extremist narratives, it contributes to creating a peaceful society (Bukhari, 1987). The key themes of Pashtun folklore, such as love, brotherhood, honor, ethical principles aligned with values like hospitality, respect for elders, non-violence, and respect for humanity, can contribute to richer dialogues. Pashtun folklore, deeply rooted in cultural and religious traditions, spreads knowledge, entertainment, and cultural expressions, while reinforcing the socio-cultural life of the Pashtun community and promoting peace at the grassroots level (Rohi, 1986). Pashtun culture and folklore represent the myriad customs, beliefs, and social life of the community and help enhance social cohesion and resist extremist influences.

Analysis and Findings: Pashtun Folklore, Community Resilience and CVE

Community-focused approaches have gained attention in countering violent extremism and Pashtun folklore[1] holds the

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[1] As Folklore is divided into three categories: **verbal, partly verbal or customary, and non-verbal or material culture**. Oral folklore includes all tradition we learn and pass on by word of mouth. This paper only takes oral folklore. It includes everything from simple language to complex texts such as myth, legend, and folk tale. Pashto folk poetry comprises of Tappa Charbitha, Nimkai, Loba, Ghagoona Ghaarey and songs. These are different genre of folk poetry. For this study only Pashto *Tappa, and Mataluna (proverbs) have been selected. Tappa* portrays romantic, social, economic, religious, political in

potential to play a significant role in promoting community resilience in the Pashtun community. Pashtun traditional tales offer a potent means to counter the rise of violent extremism through various strategies. They serve to challenge extremist ideologies, promote positive values, and foster dialogues on sensitive subjects. The roots of Pashto folklore extend back five millennia, encompassing diverse genres like Charbetti, Tappa, Proverb, Story, Durri, Nemakai, Bagati, Allahoo, Songs for children, and Kakari, each of which conveys profound meanings. Among these genres, Mataluna (Proverbs) and Tappa stand out, appearing as concise expressions with profound wisdom.

Pashto folklore is the culmination of lifetimes of experiences and observations, embodying the collective wisdom of its people. Folkloric elements are akin to the seasoning of a meal, enhancing conversations with their rich cultural significance. These narratives explore multifaceted themes, with love, brotherhood, honor, and humanity's reverence prominently featured. This, in turn, compels individuals to embellish their discourse with these timeless proverbs.

The cultural richness and deep-seated religious influences in Pashtun folklore make it a versatile medium for the transmission

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short each and every aspect of Pashtun culture can be seen in *Tappa. Mataluna* (Proverbs) a highly valued expression of Pashtun identity and survived to guide them on all grounds (everyday life experiences). In the Pashto language, proverbs are known as *Mataluna*, a highly valued expression of Pashtun identity and survived to guide them on all grounds (everyday life experiences).

of knowledge, entertainment, and cultural expressions. It plays a vital role in the social and cultural fabric of the Pashtun community, contributing to a shared identity and a collective sense of purpose. By harnessing the transformative potential of folklore, local communities can forge stronger social bonds, resist extremist influences, and actively participate in grassroots peacebuilding efforts.

Folklore represents the amalgamation of countless customs, habits, beliefs, thought processes, and social interactions of a community. In today's modern world, its importance has surged, driven by the isolation brought about by advancements in science and technology, leading individuals towards artificiality and self-centeredness. In this era marked by depression, anxiety, and extremism, those with fragile resilience have fallen prey to psychological, superstitious, and extremist tendencies, along with moral frailties. As Noor Ul Basar Aman, a local writer and researcher, aptly notes, "In such circumstances, folklore not only imparts peace of mind but also equips individuals to confront challenges with courage and patience. It instills the values of humanity in society." Echoing this sentiment, Farigh Bukhari (1987) describes folklore as a beacon of hope and a gentle breeze from heaven, offering a glimpse of a joyful, playful, and cheerful life. It imparts simplicity and a lifestyle characterized by gratitude and love, infusing the harshness of contemporary existence with the colors of human innocence.

Muhammad Nawaz Tahir, the living repository of Pashto folklore, emphasizes that Pashto proverbs represent the guiding principles and laws of Pashtun wisdom and knowledge. These proverbs serve as the keys to unlocking life's intricate puzzles, offering solutions to issues and conflicts. They mend fractures and discord, ultimately upholding peace in society.

In contrast to Western or imported methodologies, the utilization of local knowledge in the form of folklore is crucial for comprehending Pashtun culture and its essential components, particularly in the context of building community resilience against violent extremism. As previously highlighted, the Pashtuns adhere to a customary code known as Pashtunwali, a system deeply rooted in unwritten rules that are intricately interwoven with their folklore.

The renowned Pashto poet and writer, Rehmat Shah Sayel, emphasizes the significance of indigenous Pashto knowledge and approaches in addressing the contemporary challenges faced by the Pashtun community. He firmly believes that foreign ideas and concepts are ill-suited for our Pashtun society, advocating for the reliance on our native knowledge and ideas to shape our own destiny. He eloquently states, "We have always attempted, but never succeeded, in enhancing our identity with the borrowed colors of others. Let us instead embrace the earth from our own streets to adorn ourselves."

Regarding the role of folklore in promoting peace and countering extremism and violence, Muhammad Siddiqui Rohi (1986) underscores its positive aspects, conveying messages of love, peace, harmony, brotherhood, and prosperity among the people through Pashto Folklore.

In his book "Pashto Tappa," Pashto writer Dawar Khan Dawood eloquently describes Pashto folklore, highlighting its heartwarming songs of love. *Tappa's* voice resonates against social injustices, cruelty, violence, poverty, hunger, and deprivation. It passionately advocates for the rights of poor laborers and tenants while condemning the cruelties and oppression inflicted upon them by landlords and large farmers. This art form encapsulates the various facets of Pashtun daily life in simple yet profound words.

During an interview, an elderly individual emphasized the formidable strength of Pashtun culture, which envelops every aspect of Pashtun life through cultural norms and oral traditions. They went on to assert that folklore effectively conveys the genuine image, thoughts, and emotions of the Pashtun community.

Folklore assumes a pivotal role in Pashtun society, serving as a catalyst for unity, the propagation of positive values, social cohesion, inclusivity, pluralism, and the transmission of

fundamental principles, thereby nurturing resilience against violent extremism (Rohi, 1986; Bukhari, 1987; Noor Ul Basar, Personal Communication). It acts as a conduit for instilling a sense of belonging, providing inspiration, and delivering education (Noor Ul Basar, personal communication; Bukhari, 1987). The Pashto folklore, including proverbs and Tappa, serves as a repository of Pashtun wisdom, addressing the complexities of Pashtun life, including issues of social injustice, poverty, and oppression (Pashto language expert, Personal Communication, April 11, 2023).

By preserving cultural identity, advocating for peace, and vocalizing opposition to injustice, folklore reinforces social bonds and contributes to resilience against the tide of violent extremism (Rohi, 1986; Noor Ul Basar, personal communication). It encapsulates the genuine image, thoughts, and emotions of the Pashtun community, as passionately expressed by participants in group discussions.

Pashtun folklore serves as a compass for moral guidance by imparting ethical principles that align with the core values of the community, including hospitality, reverence for elders, and non-violence. These principles work to counter the ideologies of violent extremism. Proverbs such as "*Chi Sa Karay, hagha ba Raibay*" (You reap what you sow) and "*Khairat da koor na shuru kegi*" (Charity begins at home) underscore the importance of

personal responsibility and acts of kindness, as shared by a Pashto Poet and Expert (personal communication, April 20, 2023).

Furthermore, during a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), a participant highlighted that Pashto folklore addresses issues like expectations, jealousy, and greed, which can disrupt societal harmony. The proverbs caution against these social ills, with sayings like "*Duniya ka da yao kas she, ho morr ba pay nashi*" (Even if one person owned the world, he wouldn't be satisfied with it) and "*Chay da bal dar ta ye tama she, mun ghowakha ye kama she*" (Those who expect and look toward others, he loses his weight) serving as reminders to shun these negative traits.

Despite the prolonged violent conflict in Pashtun areas, Pashto folklore remains a beacon of positive cultural identity, celebrating heritage and diversity as a counter-narrative to the rhetoric of violent extremists, as noted by Noor Muhammad Danish (Personal Communication, April 27, 2023). This cultural heritage offers profound insights into the daily lives and character of the Pashtun people (Rohi, 1986). One of the core values, *Melmastia*, emphasizing hospitality, plays a central role in Pashtunwali, the way of life for Pashtuns (Jellani, 1975). For instance, Pashto Tappa expressions like "*Khaawanda tola mey threy zar kray! Da yar da kale milmana reghelee deena*" (O, Lord! I would like to serve my heart to the guests who came from the village of my

lover) underscore the importance of hospitality, a practice embraced by both genders (N. Muhammad Danish, Personal Communication, April 27, 2023).

Pashtunwali has consistently embraced religious pluralism and cultural diversity, firmly prohibiting any form of mockery or insult directed at others' beliefs, as explained by Noor Ul Basar (Personal Communication, April 30, 2023). This inclusive approach is reflected in *Tappa* expressions like "*Yaar may hindo za Musalman yem! Da yaar dapara daramsaal jaro kawoma*" (My friend is Hindu; while I am Muslim, for my beloved friend, I am cleaning sanctuary), which emphasize religious pluralism, harmony, co-existence, and religious tolerance. The Tappa highlights the message that we should extend our assistance to anyone in need, regardless of their religious background. In this particular *Tappa*, a Muslim helps his Hindu friend clean the temple, exemplifying the spirit of unity and mutual respect.

Even during the partition of India, Pashtun folklore mourned the separation of Hindus and other minority groups, underscoring the profound attachment of Pashtun culture to the land and diversity. Presently, Pashtun regions continue to accommodate a significant number of Hindus, Sikhs, and other minorities. The Tappa "*Pa manda kay Hindowan ma zaghalawa! Za pakhtun jowanday yem bach kawom*" (Do not shatter the Hindus, Behold I, a Pashtun warrior, is here to defend them) exemplifies the responsibility of

Pashtun people to protect and stand up for minority communities (Pashto Language Expert, Personal Communication, April 30, 2023).

Pashtun folklore plays a pivotal role in fostering community resilience by promoting social cohesion, tolerance, and understanding, effectively countering extremist ideologies (Pashto Teacher, Personal Communication, May 2, 2023). Proverbs such as "*Zourawar na ya lary ya ghaly*" (With the strong/cruel one, either keep your distance or your peace) serve as warnings against disrupting peace and harmony. Similarly, expressions like "*Chay za za yem, ao ta ta ye, na ba ta shay, na ba za sham, ao chay lag ta shay, lag za sham, hum ba ta shay, hum ba za sham*" (If I am saying I am I, and you say that you are you, then neither will be you nor I, but if a little bit you compromise, and a little me, then you will also get benefit and I too) encourage compromise and mutual benefit. Additionally, proverbs like "*Sok ma waha pa gowatha! Ta ba na woli pa gatta*" (Do not beat someone with your finger, He will not stone you) advise against resorting to violence in resolving conflicts.

Pashtun folklore plays a crucial role in reinforcing cultural identity and nurturing a profound sense of belonging among Pashtuns, effectively acting as a protective shield against extremist ideologies. Within these folklore traditions, narratives, songs, and dances serve as vessels for the transmission of cultural

values, traditions, and norms, fostering a shared identity (Pashto Teacher, Personal Communication, May 11, 2023). Proverbs like "*Khpal biya hum khpal we*" (Blood is thicker than water) and "*Chay zdaa kray pakhwanai, Hayr ba na kray tar pyrai*" (That which is learned in youth is not forgotten in old age) underscore the importance of cultural bonds. References to "*Asal nasal*" (ethnic origin) within Pashto folklore further solidify cultural identity (Pashto Teacher, Personal Communication, May 11, 2023).

Furthermore, the dissemination of core values stands as a vital facet of Pashtun folklore, profoundly shaping the conduct of individuals and social groups. Pashtunwali, a code of honor, encompasses values such as honor, bravery, respect for elders, and hospitality, handed down through the generations (Female Teacher, Personal Communication, May 22, 2023). Folklore narratives serve as moral guides, promoting values like peace, tolerance, unity, and respect for diversity, effectively countering extremist ideologies (Pashto Teacher, Personal Communication, May 22, 2023). Proverbs such as "*Pukhtun chay pukhto na krri, nu zamaka day pay daka she*" (A Pashtun who does not follow his code of life should be buried in a grave) and "*Pa khowala hoog, pa zrra koog*" (A well-spoken man always has a craggy/bumpy heart) exemplify these core values, emphasizing honor, faithfulness, and the rejection of deceit and jealousy (Female Pashto Teacher, Personal Communication, May 22,

2023). These proverbs vividly illustrate the character of a genuine Pashtun, one who upholds integrity and goodwill towards others.

Pashtun folklore is a rich source of wisdom for conflict resolution, offering valuable insights into peacefully resolving disputes. It serves as a repository of knowledge that can be drawn upon to address social tensions and prevent their escalation into violence. Proverbs like "*Ka ghar loway day, pa sar ye laar da*" (Though the mountain is high, there still be a road to its top) underscore the importance of finding nonviolent solutions to challenges (Pashto Professor, Personal Communication, May 29, 2023). Furthermore, the role of folklore in conflict resolution is accentuated by the use of proverbs in specific situations (Noor ul Basar, Personal Communication, May 29, 2023). These proverbs advocate for dialogue, peaceful resolution, and the futility of violence. Proverbs such as "*Wena pa wena na wenzal kegi*" (Blood cannot be cleaned by blood) highlight the significance of peaceful dispute resolution (Noor ul Basar, Personal Communication, May 29, 2023). Many other proverbs and Tappas provide guidance on humility, the role of village elders, the consequences of arrogance, settling unpaid debts, and offer lessons in conflict resolution, peaceful dialogue, and the importance of relationships in resolving conflicts (Noor ul Basar, Personal Communication, May 29, 2023). The utilization of proverbs in specific contexts exemplifies the wisdom embedded

in Pashtun folklore for addressing social tensions and preventing violence (Pashto Poet, Personal Communication, May 30, 2023).

During a group discussion, a participant expressed regret over the loss of the bedtime story tradition, emphasizing the vital role of these stories in nurturing peaceful coexistence, promoting pluralism, and enabling the suspension of disbelief, allowing for the exploration of magical worlds that embody humanism, piety, and selfless sacrifice.

Pashtun folklore serves to strengthen social bonds and promote unity through storytelling, music, and communal celebrations. As one participant in a Focus Group Discussion pointed out, proverbs like "*Pukhtana wanrra sara yao di!*" (All of the Pashtuns are united) underscore the themes of unity and national pride. Folklore empowers local voices, enabling individuals to express their concerns and ideas, thus countering extremist narratives, as mentioned by another participant. Proverbs like "*Raas osa, pa loya laar k mlast osa*" (Live a good life, and thus need not fear while sleeping on the road) discourage social ills.

Pashtun folklore serves as a vehicle for transmitting fundamental values, nurturing peace, tolerance, and a deep respect for diversity. Proverbs like "*Hapal amal da laray mal day*" (The actions of a man are his companions) underscore the significance of personal responsibility (Pashto Poet, Personal Communication,

June 1, 2023). Furthermore, it actively involves the younger generation by incorporating folklore into educational programs and encouraging their participation in socio-cultural activities. As one participant in a Focus Group Discussion noted, "The role of folklore in engaging youth is evident in the use of music, poetry, and traditional dances to promote peace and counter extremism."

To conclude, Pashtun folklore plays a pivotal role in fostering community resilience, advancing the cause of peace, and empowering local voices to counter extremism. Through the art of storytelling and cultural rituals, it effectively communicates values of tolerance and resilience as a powerful alternative to extremist ideologies. Initiatives that harness the potential of Pashtun folklore are indispensable in the ongoing battle against violent extremism within the community.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the research findings, this paper presents a set of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners aimed at promoting and supporting the utilization of Pashtun folklore to enhance community resilience against violent extremism:

1. Preservation and Documentation: It is imperative to invest in the preservation and comprehensive documentation of Pashtun folklore to ensure its preservation for future generations.

101

2. Education Integration: Policymakers should prioritize the integration of folklore-based educational initiatives into both formal and informal learning systems to provide youth with access to this valuable cultural heritage.

3. Collaborative Initiatives: Collaboration among community leaders, cultural practitioners, and policymakers is crucial for designing and implementing context-specific interventions that harness the potential of Pashtun folklore.

4. Research Promotion: Encouraging research on Pashtun folklore is vital to further understand its applications in countering violent extremism.

5. Awareness and Education: Pashtun folklore should be incorporated into Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs through awareness-raising campaigns, radio programs, and educational materials to reach a wider audience.

6. Community-Led CVE Initiatives: Policymakers should lend support to the development of community-led CVE initiatives that draw on local knowledge and traditions.

7. Social Cohesion: Initiatives that promote social cohesion and trust-building among different groups within the Pashtun community should be supported by policymakers.

8. Conflict Resolution and Mediation Skills: Policymakers should invest in training and capacity building programs that

enhance conflict resolution and mediation skills within the Pashtun community.

9. Critical Thinking and Tolerance: Policymakers should support community-led education initiatives that foster critical thinking, religious tolerance, and non-violent conflict resolution.

10. Empowerment of Women and Youth: Policymakers should support initiatives that empower women and youth groups to participate in CVE programs and decision-making processes, promoting gender equality and youth participation.

11. Incorporation in Education: Policy makers should develop and implement educational programs that incorporate Pashtun folklore to promote cultural identity, moral values, and resilience among young people. This includes integrating folklore in school curricula, textbooks at various educational levels, organizing folklore-based workshops, and training teachers to incorporate folklore in their teaching methods.

12. Promotion of Folklore and Cultural Festivals: Encourage and support community-led initiatives that promote Pashtun folklore and cultural festivals to showcase the richness of Pashtun culture, foster a sense of belonging and unity, and counter extremist narratives.

13. Folklore Preservation and Documentation Support: Allocate resources to support the preservation, documentation, and dissemination of Pashtun folklore through the establishment

of folklore research centers, grants for researchers and folklorists, and digital platforms for sharing folklore resources.

14. Training Programs: Provide training programs for community leaders, educators, and youth workers to effectively use Pashtun folklore in countering violent extremism through workshops on understanding the power of folklore, utilizing folklore in conflict resolution, and engaging youth through folklore-based initiatives.

15. Multi-sectoral Collaboration: Promote multi-sectoral collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and community leaders to develop comprehensive strategies for countering violent extremism in different sectors of education, culture, social services, and youth empowerment, leveraging Pashtun folklore in creating resilient communities.

16. International Collaboration: Foster international collaboration and exchange programs to share experiences and best practices in utilizing folklore for countering violent extremism. Partner with international organizations, research institutions, and practitioners in related fields to enhance the effectiveness of interventions and broaden perspectives on utilizing folklore as a tool for resilience.

Conclusion

This paper underscores the pivotal role of Pashtun folklore, local voices, and community resilience in countering violent extremism. Pashtun folklore stands as a potent instrument for bolstering community resilience, strengthening social bonds, amplifying local voices, imparting essential values, and engaging the youth. Through the mediums of storytelling, oral traditions, and cultural rituals, Pashtun folklore effectively communicates the values of peace, tolerance, and resilience, presenting an alternative narrative to extremist ideologies. Moreover, it facilitates community engagement, encourages dialogue, and inspires collective action.

To effectively combat violent extremism, this study underscores the significance of community resilience, which is shaped by various factors, including robust social networks, access to education and economic opportunities, effective governance, and a shared sense of responsibility. Initiatives that harness Pashtun folklore and promote community resilience are integral components of any strategy aimed at addressing extremism within the Pashtun community.

Drawing from the findings, several policy recommendations are proposed. These encompass supporting community-led initiatives, investing in education and economic opportunities,

and safeguarding Pashtun folklore as a valuable cultural asset. It is imperative for policymakers to allocate resources, provide community support, develop educational and cultural programs, and collaborate with local leaders to implement these recommendations effectively. Furthermore, an emphasis on inclusivity, diversity, research, and collaboration should take precedence to build resilient communities and promote peaceful coexistence.

To conclude, by harnessing the transformative power of Pashtun folklore and prioritizing community resilience, policymakers can effectively counter violent extremism, preserve cultural identity, and foster peace within the Pashtun community.

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