

Radicalization of Women in Pakistani Madrassas: A Case of Jamia

Hafsa

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Abstract

This paper examines the underreported phenomenon of radicalization among women in Pakistani madrassas, with a particular focus on the cases observed at Jamia Hafsa in Islamabad. The covert support of extremist groups such as Daesh and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) by female students at these madrassas presents a potential threat, particularly given the increasing penetration of ISIS ideology in the region and the TTP's revived recruitment efforts that targets women. Adopting a qualitative methodology, this research combines primary and secondary data sources, analyzed through a descriptive and analytical framework using discourse analysis. Despite its increasing significance, the process of radicalization among young girls attending Pakistani madrassas remains under-explored in existing literature. This research seeks to address this gap by investigating the case of Jamia Hafsa. The paper concludes by proposing practical measures that can help prevent and counter radicalization of women in Pakistani madrassas.

Keywords: Lal Masjid, Jamia Hafsa, Daesh, Tehreek-e-Taliban, Radicalization, Madrassa, Women Radicalization, Extremism.

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1. Introduction

In the aftermath of 9/11, the discourse around madrassas and how they contribute towards extremism has dominated discussions, often overshadowing the multi-faceted socio-economic roles these institutions traditionally performed. Historically centers for religious and ethical education, madrassas since the Afghanwar have gone through a radical transformation. From providing recruits that sustained the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets, these religious seminaries have over the years gained a notorious reputation for producing radicals and extremists that threaten the very fabric of free and tolerant society. These Madrassas have thus proven to have the potential to negatively impact societies if exploited or manipulated by extremist ideologies. Though this charge of manipulation and exploitation is typically restricted to male students, female students at these madrassas should not be exempt from this scrutiny, as indications of radical tendencies among them has frequently been observed.¹

Based on my field research at Lahore-based madrassas for women, certain narratives and belief systems (otherwise associated with extremism and radicalization), among students were widely observed. These included very rigid views on hijab, plenary admiration for Islamist personalities, supportive roles in Jihad, adherence to conspiracy theories, and strong anti-West and anti-diversity attitudes, all of which can potentially precipitate non-violent radicalization.² However, the prospects of violent radicalization in these institutions, at least at this stage, seem relatively low due to their staunch rejection of active female militancy in Islam. An exception to this trend can be seen in the case of Jamia Hafsa, a female seminary in Pakistan with a history of resorting to violent means to enforce/defend

¹ Mohamad Malla, "Madrasas and Extremism," in *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, ed. Ronald Lukens-Bull and Mark Woodward (n.p.: Springer, Cham, 2021), 1169, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32626-5_50.

² From May 31 to July 17, 2022, I visited almost ten Lahore-based madrassas for women. Only three of them (one Bareilvi and two Deobandi madrassas) permitted me to do research at their institution.

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its interpretation of Islam. Its parent institution, Lal Masjid, allegedly maintains links with both foreign and domestic militant organizations.

Historically, religious radicalization among women in Pakistani madrassas has appeared in two forms. The first involves a supportive role of women in Jihad, potentially utilizing female religious seminaries and other platforms.³ The second, first observed among the students of Jamia Hafsa, encourages women to assume an active role in militancy.⁴ This paper aims to explore the theme of women's radicalization in Pakistani madrassas, focusing on the case of Jamia Hafsa. It aims to uncover the processes that may lead to the radicalization of young minds within these religious institutions. After a brief historical overview of the institution, this study will examine the potential threat that such female religious seminaries might pose within the current militancy landscape of Pakistan. Utilizing a conceptual framework adapted from Fairhurst's work, the paper (in order to identify potential radical content) will carry out a discourse analysis on primary data sourced from Jamia Hafsa's social media speeches and a booklet authored by the principal of the institution.

2. Literature Review

According to David Rapoport, the current wave of terrorism that started in the late 1970's is essentially a religious one⁵. At the heart of this wave are religious fundamentalists that have sought to exploit religious institutions and seminaries (madrassas in particular) for their nefarious political ends. Unfortunately Pakistan, home to one of the largest madrasa system in the world, could not escape the clutches of religious extremism, and as a result a large portion of its population has

³ See for instance, Farhat Haq, "Militarism and Motherhood: The Women of the Lashkar-i-Tayyabia in Pakistan," *Signs: Journal Of Women in Culture and Society* 32, No. 4 (2007): 1023-1046, doi:10.1086/512729.

⁴ See e.g., Muhammad Hamza and Adila Kokab, "Operation Silence Cultivated the Grounds of Militancy in Pakistan," *International Journal of Political Science and Development* Vol 7, No. 3 (2019): pp. 80-91. <http://www.academicresearchjournals.org/IJPSD/Index.html>.

⁵ David Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism", *Terrorism Studies*, 2013, 63-82.

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suffered badly. Since a large number female students also attend madrassas in Pakistan, the scope of extremist intrusion at these seminaries is not just limited to male students. Rebecca Cataldi (2007), an American scholar, has identified radicalelements in one or two madrassas during her visit to five female madrassas in Pakistan while experiencing cooperative behavior from rest of madrassas.⁶

In this respect, Pakistan, like other nations with active and radical women wings, is confronting some fairly systematic and institutionalized extremist dangers. Zahid (2019) highlights the involvement of women in Islamist terrorism and examines three female-oriented institutions, namely Jamia Hafsa, Al-Huda International, and Zikra Academy, which he claims are creating fertile ground for female radicalization that could potentially also lead to terrorism.⁷ Noor and Hussain (2009) also highlight similar problems in the religious institutions for women in Pakistan. They identify religious seminaries (*Darus*) by religious schools and publications by militant organizations as among the most important sources of spreading radicalization among women.⁸ Any discussion concerning the radicalization of women on Pakistan's soil should not avoid critically evaluating Jamia Hafsa, given the historical context of extremist activities supported by students of this specific seminary in 2007 that ultimately resulted in the siege of Lal Masjid.⁹

⁶ Rebecca Cataldi, "Visit to Pakistani Women's Madrasas, April 23-29, 2007" (official memorandum, Washington, DC: International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, 2007), https://www.worldcat.org/title/visit-to-pakistani-womens-madrasas-april-2007/oclc/1103714216&referer=brief_results.

⁷ Farhan Zahid, "Women in Islamist Terrorism in Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of Terrorism Research* Vol. 1, Issue 1 (2019): 33-53. <https://nacta.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/IS-and-AQ-Inroads-in-Pakistan.pdf>.

⁸ Saba Noor and Daniela Hussain, *Women Radicalization: An Empirical Study*, (Islamabad, Pakistan: Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2019), 1-36, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327931313_Women_Radicalization_An_Empirical_Study.

⁹ This point is further explained in the upcoming part on history of Jamia Hafsa.

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Ahmed (2008) briefly and chronologically describes the events leading to the Red Mosque incident in Pakistan's capital city, Islamabad, in 2007.¹⁰ Hamza and Kokab (2019) also provide a detailed analysis of all the pre-events of Red Mosque incident. First, they narrate a brief history of this institution, in terms of its relationship with militants and ideological inspiration. Following this historical background, they discuss the aftermath of the crisis and the implications for the Pakistani state that has since incurred a huge financial and human cost.¹¹ The aforementioned research on Jamia Hafsa, however, is somewhat silent on the process of radicalization of the students and the methods systematically employed by the seminary to achieve this covert goal.

3. Methodology

Under the qualitative method, descriptive and analytical approaches are used in this study. While following this, I will first describe the history of the institution, then I will attempt to find out its potentially controversial militant links, and finally critically analyzed some primary data associated with this seminary. This research is deductive, as I have tested an existing concept on the targeted issue. Both primary and secondary data are employed and are analyzed through discourse analysis. In addition to a few elite interviews, primary data includes information from the official social media accounts of Jamia Hafsa, radicalizing speeches delivered at the campus of Jamia Hafsa, and a booklet written by Um-e-Hassan on the Red Mosque incident. Secondary data includes books, research papers, and news regarding the subject matter. Moreover, discourse analysis is a type of textual analysis that also takes into account the social context in which communication

¹⁰ Zahid Ahmed, "The Cycle of Violence in Pakistan," *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* Vol. 12, No. 1 (SPRING 2008): pp. 106-112, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48504874>.

¹¹ Hamza and Kokab, "Operation Silence Cultivated the Grounds of Militancy in Pakistan," pp. 80-91,

occurs.¹² This is why the discourse analysis method of data analysis has been employed in this paper to ensure an in-depth and circumstantial analysis of all the data. Additionally, I have also visited some Lahore based madrassas for women, talked with the concerned authorities, conducted focus group research and observed and recorded the thinking patterns of female students to gain an in-depth understanding of any underlying radicalized tendencies.

4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this article is borrowed from the book ‘The Power of Framing: Creating the Language of Leadership’ by Gail T. Fairhurst. In this book, Fairhurst talks about the art of framing or communicating any concept in a language. Metaphorical frame and master frame from the five types of frames discussed in the above-mentioned book¹³ are deemed suitable to be applied to the language of women in Jamia Hafsa. Under the umbrella of these frames, different types of language forms can be used in the framing of ideas. I see metaphorical, story, contrast, and feeling statement types of language forms¹⁴ as being used by women at Jamia Hafsa in their speeches and writings to construct their radicalizing narratives.

In the metaphorical frame, simple or complex metaphors are being used. Fairhurst argues that ‘complex metaphors are often the foundation for *stories* and other narrative forms like parables, fables, and folktales’.¹⁵ While the master frame, historically originating from the ‘study of social movement’,¹⁶ is meant to express

¹² Research Tube, *Types of Qualitative Data Analysis [Purposes, Steps, Example]*, video, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxES6YYwMs&t=95s>.

¹³ Gail Fairhurst, “The Art of Framing,” in *The Power of Framing: Creating the Language of Leadership* (San Francisco, USA: Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint, 2011), 94, <https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-power-of-framing-creating-the-language-of-leadership-j-b-us-non-franchise-leadership-volume-290-e157081807.html>.

¹⁴ See e.g.; Table 4.1 to know about different types of language forms and their completedescription in the book under discussion, Fairhurst, “The Art of Framing,” 93.

¹⁵ Fairhurst, 94.

¹⁶ Fairhurst, 100.

some ‘organizational vision¹⁷.’ In this language frame, orators can ‘inspire and mobilize people’ with the use of correct words. He further explains, ‘There is often sloganeering involved’.¹⁸ This paper is primarily trying to find out how the innocent minds of young girls get radicalized in madrassas of Pakistan by taking up the case of Jamia Hafsa. As it is identified that religious seminaries (*Darus*) by religious schools are among the sources of radicalization¹⁹, there might be some language issues that cause radicalization. This precisely the reason why this paper will utilize the Fairhurst framework to analyze the language of women at Jamia Hafsa.

5. History of Students’ Activation at Jamia Hafsa

As far as militant radicalization of women in madrassas of Pakistan is concerned, the starting point of this is perhaps the Madrassa Jamia Hafsa in Islamabad. ‘In the contemporary sense, radicalization of women in madrassas of Pakistan has its origins in Lal Masjid, Islamabad’.²⁰ In 1992, Jamia Hafsa was established ‘as a sister branch of Jamiat ul Ulom al Islamia al Faridia (1984); both affiliated to the Jamia Mosque of G-6, popularly known as the Lal Masjid’.²¹ Active religious radicalization of women in Pakistan at a massive level was first observed among the students of Jamia Hafsa. Female students of Jamia Hafsa reacted violently and created chaos ‘in the city after the assassination of the Emir of *Sipah-e-Sahaba* (an anti-Shia organization) in October 2003’.²² However, at the time it was not highlighted as a platform for women's radicalization and it was not until tensions escalated between the authorities of the madrassa and the government that the issue formally surfaced.

¹⁷ Fairhurst, 99.

¹⁸ Fairhurst, 100.

¹⁹ Hamza and Kokab

²⁰ Singapore based journalist, interviewed by author, June 22, 2022.

²¹ Saadia Abid, "Religion as Faith? Education Purdah and Modernity an Ethnographic Study of Islamabad's Madrassah Jamia Hafsa" (Ph.D., University of Vienna, 2010), <https://phaidra.univie.ac.at/open/o:1268612>.

²² Zahid, "Women in Islamist Terrorism," 44.

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Jamia Hafsa formally started expanding in March 2001. Its rapid expansion rang alarm bells in the government circles. After issuing notices and warnings to Jamia Hafsa and many other masjids and madrassas in Islamabad and its neighboring areas that were having illegal encroachments over the state's lands, the Capital Development Authority (Islamabad) initiated official operation of demolishing these illegal buildings on encroached lands.²³ Government authorities up until this point had not initiated any forceful operation against Jamia Hafsa. However, this began to change when some female students from this particular seminary occupied the adjacent children's library in order to perhaps preempt a governmental response. The government authorities, at this stage, dealt with them peacefully and 'laid the foundation stone at the site where the Amir Hamza Mosque once stood²⁴.' After this, the 'burqa brigade (as they began to be referred to as),²⁵ of Jamia Hafsa showed some flexibility in their encroachment on the library and put forth some conditions for withdrawal. Um-e-Hassan, principal of Jamia Hafsa, both backed and encouraged the actions of the radicalized students²⁶.

Following this incident, the demands of the female students greatly intensified in the following months, and a subsequent Lathi Raj in Islamabad by Jamia Hafsa students to enforce Sharia was the culmination of this increasingly radicalized behavior. The government that had thus far been reluctant to engage them directly, could no longer continue to ignore and appease them. Strict reactions from the public, civil society, and other religious authorities in Pakistan and the apparent ties of Lal Masjid authorities with Al-Qaeda persuaded the government to reconsider their earlier position. Subsequent distribution of fatwas from Lal Masjid and harassment of police by people at madrassas affiliated with Lal Masjid further intensified the situation. Then, meetings among top authorities in the country were

²³ Adam Dolnik and Khuram Iqbal, *Negotiating the Siege of The Lal Masjid*, 1st ed. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²⁴ Dolnik and Iqbal, *Negotiating the Siege of The Lal Masjid*, 33.

²⁵ Dolnik and Iqbal, 32.

²⁶ Dolnik and Iqbal, 33.

held to find a permanent solution to the Lal Masjid issue.²⁷ Despite all such activities and disturbances from the side of Lal Masjid, government initially continued to use peaceful methods like initiation of negotiations through Mufti Taqi Usmani, arranging a Friday sermon by Imam-e-Kaba to warn extremists and radicals, etc. in order to resolve the situation.²⁸

Finally, situation worsened when a few students from Jamia Hafsa, along with their male colleagues, kidnapped Chinese women from the Capital city. Although the Chinese citizens were subsequently released, the authorities realized that it was simply not possible to continue appeasing and tolerating the transgressions of Jamia Hafsa any more (increasing pressure from the Chinese government was also a key factor). At this point, Pakistan's military decided to initiate the controversial military operation against this institution in July 2007.²⁹ Unfortunately, even after a very disturbing operation at Lal Masjid that resulted in a number of deaths and casualties, government could not root out the radicalized aspirations that had initially set the events in motion. This failure is pronounced even today as radical indoctrination of women in Jamia Hafsa remained unchecked and continued year after year.

6. Potential Threat from Jamia Hafsa

While the events of Lal Masjid transpired nearly 15 years ago, the threat from this particular religious seminary seems to have evolved with the developing militant landscape of the region. Their bold, audacious, and open acceptance of Daesh and Tehreek-e-Taliban in Pakistan is deeply alarming and may signal some serious consequences in the years to come. It seems that current militant landscape of

²⁷ Dolnik and Iqbal, 34-50.

²⁸ Dekho Suno Jano, "History of Pakistan #58 | What Happened in Lal Masjid?" YouTube, November 07, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gJidLrkefk>.

²⁹ Dekho Suno Jano, "History of Pakistan #59 | Last Moments of Lal Masjid?" YouTube, November 20, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttod14zce6U&list=PLYt5jguM4dGwPAeLXmNorJV559crcMvuN&index=60>.

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Pakistan is characterized by gradual penetration of ISIS and its ideology in the region and TTP's reviving efforts to attract women to their agenda. Keeping in mind these circumstances, this paper predicts the potential danger women in Jamia Hafsa may pose in the current and upcoming militant landscape of Pakistan. Let us now analyze both militant groups with respect to Jamia Hafsa separately.

6.1. Daesh

Daesh is a famous militant organization, especially in the context of the Middle East. Daesh is notorious for exploiting women by using the concept of Jihad Feminism Theory.³⁰ This group may pose some potential threats to women in the South Asian region in the near future. Let us explore this further.

Farhan Zahid mentions, '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-Baghdadi³¹'. These girls actually invited Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to join them in their mission of taking revenge for the 2007 Lal Masjid military operation against them.³² Zahid further adds that students of this religious school were traditionally aligned with Al-Qaeda and Taliban and now their sudden change of allegiance towards Daesh is really surprising.³³ I would argue here that it was not quite surprising. Instead, it was a warning for Pakistan's security agencies, think tanks, officials and counter radicalization policy makers. Since Taliban and Al-Qaeda had not actively supported women participation in combatant roles, Daesh on the other hand had regularly used Muslim women extensively in its Jihadi agenda and

³⁰ It dictates that women should be involved in armed struggle against non-Muslims equally with men of Islam. And this is actually the empowerment of women in Islam.; Joseph Makanda, 'The Jihad Feminist Dynamics of Terrorism and Subordination of Women in the ISIS', *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies* 8(2):135-8, no. 2 (2019): 135, doi:10.17583/generos.2019.3814.

³¹ Zahid, 47.

³² Imtiaz Gul, "Women's Role in Recruitment for ISIS/Islamist Networks in Pakistan," *International Annals of Criminology*, 56 (2018): 79-92, doi:10.1017/cri.2018.15

³³ Zahid, 47.

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propaganda. In Daesh, women are observed to perform varied functions, including supportive roles as wives, mothers, sisters, active combatant roles, and administrative roles as recruiters and caretakers.³⁴ Daesh's propaganda has even been effective in calling educated Muslim women from Western backgrounds towards active militancy.³⁵

Since the advent of ISIS in the political landscape of world, a lot of militant groups, influential Jihadists and radical clerics based in Pakistan and Afghanistan have pledged allegiance to Daesh. And it seems that ISIS is gradually penetrating this region, perhaps due to their territorial losses in Syria.³⁶ Gul identifies four noticeable trends regarding IS in Pakistan. One of these trends that is particularly shocking and alarming is 'female support for Daesh'³⁷ in the country. Therefore, any link of Jamia Hafsa with this militant group might hold some serious repercussions in the near future as ISIS directly seeks to target women. In addition to the covert support of Jamia Hafsa for IS, Pakistan has also witnessed many females supporting Islamic State and moving towards Syria to sacrifice their lives for the delusional goals and objectives propagated online by Daesh since its inception in 2014.³⁸ Moreover, women in Pakistan are also observed as playing administrative role for recruitment and propagation of IS' ideology.³⁹ Therefore, it seems to be a serious threat to authorities and security agencies of Pakistan, not to mention the society and large, and should therefore be tackled properly in time before it causes some serious damage.

³⁴ Tiril Dølo, "A feminist perspective on jihadist women: a case study on the female members of Islamic State" (Master's, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, 2018), <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/2586589>.

³⁵ BBC News, "Islamic State: What Attracts Girls to ISIS?" YouTube, February 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5UoMSYcO9E>.

³⁶ See for instance; Abdul Basit, "IS Penetration in Afghanistan-Pakistan: Assessment, Impact and Implications," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 3 (June 2017): pp. 19-39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26297839>.

³⁷ Gul, "Women's Role in Recruitment", 83.

³⁸ See for instance; Zahid, 44-46.

³⁹ For details see e.g., Gul 85-87

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As a result, what was and still is concerning about this new link of Jamia Hafsa and Daesh is the risk of Pakistani women being indoctrinated by the ideology of Daesh. Previously, it seemed that women from Jamia Hafsa were active only at the domestic level through their Lathi Raj in Islamabad. Therefore, this newly established link between students of Jamia Hafsa and Daesh perhaps signaled, and even now, after almost a decade, it is still signaling, the start of a new trend in the militant landscape of South Asia. The departure of US forces from Afghanistan last year has created a power vacuum and an environment that is conducive for the likes of Daesh. In fact since last year, we have seen a rise in the activities of IS-K (Islamic State Khoran Chapter), an affiliate of Daesh that focuses on the region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Their agenda can particularly be alluring for the radicalized women at seminaries like Jamia Hafsa.

6.2. *Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan*

It seems that Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan is not an exception in this regard. Institutions associated with Lal Masjid are perhaps considered ‘spiritual centers for the Pakistan-based Taliban.’⁴⁰ After the 2007 military operation at Jamia Hafsa, a visible response from the Pakistan-based Taliban can be observed, including the establishment of the Taliban-affiliated Januda Hafsa that was aimed at the revival of Jamia Hafsa.⁴¹ And ‘at least one new branch of the TTP was created to avenge the military operation, and several Taliban-affiliated groups still refer to the Red Mosque incident to mobilize support’.⁴² Even before the operation, Red Mosque ‘issued a fatwa against the Pakistani security forces who were fighting the Taliban activists in the KPP’.⁴³

⁴⁰ Anita Singh, “Pakistan’s Stability/Instability Complex: The Politics and Reverberations of the 2007 November Emergency,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* Vol. 3, No. 4 (WINTER 2009): pp. 22-48, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26269167>.

⁴¹ Mona Sheikh, *Guardians of God: Inside the Religious Mind of the Pakistani Taliban*, 1st ed. India: Oxford University Press, 2016. 84-103.

⁴² Mona Sheikh, *Guardians of God*, 85.

⁴³ Mona Sheikh, 88.

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Whether it is Afghan Taliban or Pakistan Taliban, women from Jamia Hafsa seem to have deep respect and acceptance for them both. The Taliban brand name carries substantial weight and is widely respected across the many madrassas of Pakistan, let alone the women at Jamia Hafsa. The inspirations of Taliban and women at Jamia Hafsa appear to align perfectly.⁴⁴ Although there seems to be no formal link between Jamia Hafsa and Taliban, however, authorities at Jamia Hafsa 'are sympathetic to their jihad and the system that prevailed under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan'.⁴⁵ Almost a couple of years back, 'four to five white flags of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan were found hoisted on the rooftop of Jamia Hafsa'.⁴⁶ When Islamabad police removed those flags, Molana Abdul Aziz threatened them with these words, '*Police ki nokria choro, Taliban ayenge, Ap kahshar krdenge/ Leave the police jobs, the Taliban will come and destroy you*'.⁴⁷ Even before this incident, Um-e-Hassan of Jamia Hafsa once praised Taliban in these words, 'I am proud of the Taliban, because they have brought America and its allies to their knees'⁴⁸. Female activists at Jamia Hafsa attempt to justify Taliban rule in Afghanistan through 'heroic narratives of socioeconomic justice and the low crime rate' in their era⁴⁹ and see 'Taliban rule in Afghanistan as an Ideal government'.⁵⁰

With the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, a 'clear resurgence of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)' can be observed.⁵¹ With this, a threat of radicalization

⁴⁴ Mona Sheikh, 95.

⁴⁵ Mona Sheikh, 88.

⁴⁶ "Taliban Flags Found Hoisted on Rooftop of Jamia Hafsa Building in Islamabad," *DAWN*, August 21, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1641720>.

⁴⁷ Geo News, "*Islamabad Lal Masjid ke Khateeb Maulana Abdul Aziz par Muqadma Daraj*," YouTube, September 18, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1j7yxOZ1aE>.

⁴⁸ Zahid, "Women in Islamist Terrorism," 43.

⁴⁹ Mona Sheikh, 94.

⁵⁰ Mona Sheikh, 93.

⁵¹ Madiha Afzal, "Pakistan's Ambivalent Approach toward a Resurgent Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan," *Brookings*, March 9, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/02/11/pakistans-ambivalent-approach-toward-a-resurgent-tehrik-e-taliban-pakistan/>.

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of women has also surfaced, as TTP has launched a women-specific magazine named 'Jihad of Women' to attract the female population of the region.⁵² TTP had also issued a women-oriented magazine titled 'Sunnat-e-Khola' twice in 2017.⁵³ Considering the reviving efforts of TTP to attract Pakistani women to their agenda and the sentiments of women at Jamia Hafsa,⁵⁴ security forces and monitoring authorities must remain vigilant about the propagation of Taliban propaganda at all such madrassas and seminaries.

Interestingly, religious radicalization in Pakistan appears to be supported by factors such as role of external influences, prevailing socio-economic conditions in the country, and the appeal of extremist ideologies. The US factor is perhaps the most important external influence. Um-e-Hasan sees the ongoing jihad as a result of the actions of the enemy, i.e., the U.S.⁵⁵ Extremist ideologies tend to take advantage of strong sense of anti-Americanism prevalent in the Pakistani society.⁵⁶ Additionally, extremist ideologies and narratives, like Global Khilafat, Ghazwa-e-Hind that have widespread appeal are used by militant groups to radicalize youth in the country.⁵⁷ The socio-economic status of Pakistan is perhaps the most important factor in this regard. It seems that people from poorer backgrounds usually choose madrassa education in Pakistan. Jamia Hafsa also enjoys huge sympathy from the poorer class as most of their students come from underprivileged areas.⁵⁸ While analyzing all the afore-mentioned available

⁵² "بڑے جاری کی گالی مہنگزین TTP اب خواتین کے ذریعے ہوگا جہاد، پاکستانی دہشت گرد تنظیم کی زوی چال،" magazine- *News18 Urdu*, March 30, 2023, <https://urdu.news18.com/news/international/pakistan-ttp-women-jihad-pakistani-force-and-isi-release-video-snm-464929.html>.

⁵³ Weeda Mehran et al., "The Depiction of Women in Jihadi Magazines: A Comparative Analysis of Islamic State, Al Qaeda, Taliban and Tahrik-e Taliban Pakistan," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 33, no. 3 (July 2020), 8.

⁵⁴ See e.g., Mona Sheikh, 88 -95

⁵⁵ Mona Sheikh, 89.

⁵⁶ Abdul Basit, "Radicalization of Educated Youth in Pakistan: Traits, Narratives and Trends," *Pakistan Journal of Terrorism Research* Vol. 1, Issue 1 (2019): 20. <https://nacta.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Radicalization-of-Educated-Youth-in-Pakistan.pdf>.

⁵⁷ For details see e.g., Abdul Basit, "Radicalization of Educated Youth in Pakistan", 16-21.

⁵⁸ Mona Sheikh, 91.

knowledge, this paper predicts that women-oriented seminary Jamia Hafsa might have some potential danger of radicalization of women in the current militant landscape of Pakistan, characterized by the revival of TTP and gradual penetration of IS-K in the region.

7. Radical Indoctrination of Female Students and Jamia Hafsa

All of the above-mentioned controversial activities by students of Jamia Hafsa reveal that the students of this particular madrassa are perhaps more than just students of religion. It seems that they have over the years developed some disturbing radical tendencies. Relevant literature discusses the presence of radical tendencies among some female students or authorities of a few madrassas in Pakistan.⁵⁹ However, how the young minds of madrassa girls get radicalized seem to be somehow the main literature lacuna. To fill this gap, I have focused on the women of Jamia Hafsa and identified some controversial and radical tendencies in their speeches, beliefs, worldviews, and writings. It will be argued that, in actuality, innocent girls are being radicalized through active narrative building and radical content of the teachings imparted to them. Let us first analyze the booklet '*Saniha Lal Masjid ... Hum Par Kya Guzri?*' (Red Mosque tragedy ... What did we feel?) written by Um-e-Hassan, principal at Jamia Hafsa and wife of Maulana Abdul Aziz, to provide their stance on the Lal Masjid operation.⁶⁰

7.1. Booklet by Um-e-Hassan

In this short book, it can be clearly observed how skillfully metaphor, story, master frames and contrast language forms have been used. It can easily be discerned how stories and narratives are constructed in the booklet to deliver the organizational vision of Jamia Hafsa. With the use of the aforementioned language forms, Um-e-

⁵⁹ See for instance; Zahid, "Women in Islamist Terrorism,".

⁶⁰ Um-e-Hassan, *Saniha Lal Masjid ... Hum Pr Kya Guzri?* (Islamabad, Pakistan: Tareekh Lal Masjid Publications, 2007).

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Hassan has tried to justify the violence carried out by the students and the presence of Kalashnikovs and other weapons in the madrassa.

The booklet opens with the metaphorical statement, 'Now, I am waiting for *Ababeel*.' (*Ab mjhe intzar-e-ababeel hai*). This is a direct reference to the miraculous protection of Kaaba by the birds that destroyed the Aksumite elephant army of Abraha. Employing this reference suggests that her nation or country is being threatened by the likes of Abraha and she awaits the arrival of some miracle from God that will help destroy this threat to her nation and religion. Following this, proper narrative building is employed in the preface with the glorification of the personality of Um-e-Hassan in metaphorical language and by comparing her Jihadist character with Hazrat Khansa R.A. and Hazrat Khaula R.A. (women of early Islamic history). Um-e-Hasan, from the very beginning tries to evoke the religious fault-line of Muslims by creating a narrative of the martyrdom at Lal Masjid without mentioning the fact that their illegal encroachment, harassment of foreign citizens were the leading root cause for the military action.

Throughout the booklet, a lot of metaphorical statements have cleverly been employed. Some of these are: 'The city settled in the name of Islam will become Kufa, and the situation will resemble Karbala. In the kingdom of God that was established in the name of *Kalma Tayyiba*, the Muslims who spoke the word will be persecuted a lot' (*Islam k nam pr abad hone vala shehr koofa bn jaye ga aur ism krbala bpa kr di jaye gi, kalma tayyiba k nam pr marze wajood m ane vali mumlakat khudad main kalma go musalmano ko bht staya gya*).⁶¹ Mosques which are the sign of *Kabatullah* and the majesty of Allah (*masajid jo kabatullah ki baitya aur Allah ki azmat ki nishaniya hoti hain*).⁶² A few brave and noble women jumped into the fire without any fear (*chnd ba himmat aur azeem bchiya bekhatr is atish-e-pervaiz m kood pri*)⁶³ etc. Moreover, many contrasts and parallels, including the

⁶¹ Um-e-Hassan, *Saniha Lal Masjid ... Hum Pr Kya Guzri?* 7.

⁶² Um-e-Hassan, 8.

⁶³ Um-e-Hassan, 27.

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incident of targeting mosques in Islamabad by CDA vs the Babri Masjid incident in India⁶⁴ and the Writ of Allah vs. the Writ of the Government,⁶⁵ etc. have also been drawn in this piece of writing to discredit and denounce the actions of the state.

Um-e-Hassan tries to justify their illegal encroachment on the library by making feeling statements like ‘student started crying and arguing ...’ and by using Islamic tradition like *Istikhara*.⁶⁶ In this vein, one statement was particularly found to be controversial, i.e., ‘a little library that occupies no sanctity’ (*ak choti si library jis ko koi taqaddus hasil na tha*)⁶⁷. The question is: how can she devalue a place meant to study when the first revelation in Islam is about education?⁶⁸ The radicalization among authorities of Red Mosque seems apparent from this line. They are perhaps seeing everything outside their closed circle as disrespectful. Additionally, she relates the women's protection bill to something immodest,⁶⁹ which is again very controversial. She then goes on to greatly exaggerate the public support for the activities of women at Jamia Hafsa in an effort to continue her story-building. It is necessary to highlight that in this booklet, there are also some stories regarding the heroic and dramatic deaths of female students. Glorification of deaths of women for a cause she holds sacred, is an attempt of narrative building that clearly encourages radicalization and extremism. These arguments of Um-e- Hassan must certainly have influenced women of other madrassas as well, especially considering the prevailing sentiments across all such seminaries.

When I interviewed the principal of a Lahore based female Deobandi madrassa, she argued that ‘in the Lal Masjid episode, violence was carried out by

⁶⁴ Um-e-Hassan, 9.

⁶⁵ Um-e-Hassan, 11.

⁶⁶ Um-e-Hassan, 10.

⁶⁷ Um-e-Hassan, 11.

⁶⁸ Ahmad Sarnoto mentions that ‘the first revelation to the Messenger of Allah was Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1–5.’ He further adds, ‘In the first verse, Allah SWT ordered "*iqra*" (read) using a command sentence.’; Ahmad Sarnoto, “Enlightening Education on Quranic Perspective,” *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 3 (July 2021): pp. 712-719.

⁶⁹ Um-e-Hassan, 27.

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the state against women. Islam does not allow even slapping a woman. But they poured acid on their own women. Islamic books and Quran Majid were set on fire there.’ These were very serious allegations from their side that were neither substantiated nor evidence based.⁷⁰

Whatever the realities were, the analysis of Mufti Tariq Masood on the Jamia Hafsa incident is certainly worth mentioning here. He argues that it cannot be denied that oppression was carried out by the security personal. The mother of Ghazi Abdul Rasheed lost her life in the incident. But as far as the female students at Jamia Hafsa are concerned, not even a single girl was killed, abducted, or injured. This issue has been exaggerated in writings by religious institutions as well. He further elaborates that people send him the pieces of newspapers published by religious people. These people must question Maulana Abdul Aziz directly about this. And Maulana would tell them that no girl had been abducted, injured, martyred, or raped. All the allegations like Jamia Hafsa's girls' rape and dishonoring by army personnel and other severe allegations like that are entirely false. Even, many senior *ulema* have made a mistake in publishing this news.⁷¹ However, when Hamid Mir in his talk show, Capital Talk, asked General Javed Ashraf Qazi about any injuries to women during the Lal Masjid operation, he replied, ‘Very few.’ He further elaborated that it is understood that some collateral damage to the people inside the compound was unavoidable given the nature of the operation.⁷² Before concluding, Um-e-Hassan again uses metaphorical language to assert that ‘The souls of these martyrs are crying out that their message and mission should not be forgotten...’ (*firdous k bala khano s in shohda ki roohein pukar pukarke kh rahi hain keh hmare paighman aur hmara mishan bhula na daina...*).⁷³ In the

⁷⁰ Lahore based principal of a Deobandi madrassa, interviewed by author, June 06, 2022.

⁷¹ Mufti Tariq Masood, “*Jamia Hafsa Par Zulum by Mufti Tariq Masood*,” YouTube, June 09, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuUjCd2U7q4&t=323s>.

⁷² *Geo News*, “*Lal Masjid Massacre Capital Talk - Part 3 / 5*,” YouTube, July 21, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pMtUB2CR7g.

⁷³ Um-e-Hassan, 34.

end, she motivates and encourages people to support their mission of enforcing their vision of Islam in the country.

This was the narration of the Lal Masjid operation by Jamia Hafsa's principal back in 2007. However, as discussed above, it seems that the threat of radicalization of women by the authorities of Jamia Hafsa is not ignorable even now. It appears that they have been very active in spreading their biased agenda and restricted worldviews among their students. Official You-tube channel of Jamia Hafsa is filled with videos disseminating their propaganda that seek to brainwash religiously inclined individuals. The spirit of Jihad, as interpreted by the extremist propaganda, is still fairly pronounced among women in Jamia Hafsa. Let us explore this fact further by analyzing the content of a few religious *darus* delivered at Jamia Hafsa.

7.2. *Speech by Tayyiba Dua*

If we breakdown the contents of a speech by Tayyiba Dua, daughter of Maulana Abdul Aziz and vice-principal of Jamia Hafsa, delivered in the honor of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) after a despairing incident of blasphemy case in France⁷⁴, one can easily discern that the speech is merely an emotional tool to infuriate young minds. The speech opened with dubious historical examples of blasphemous persons in the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that were subsequently killed. She then goes on to pay tribute to the person that had stabbed the blasphemous person to death in France. After this, she denounces France as a conspirator against Muslims and uses a derogatory metaphorical slur 'the insect of disgustingly dirty

⁷⁴ On October 6, 2020, a French teacher named Samuel Paty showed caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a classroom. Consequently, a Muslim student named Abdullakh Anzorov attacked Samuel on October 16, 2020, and the student was shot dead by the police shortly after the attack, "France Teacher Attack: Seven Charged over Samuel Paty's Killing," *BBC News*, October 22, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54632353>.

It is to be clarified that the names of the teacher and student are not mentioned in the speech under discussion. However, as the speech was uploaded on YouTube on October 29, 2020, i.e., a few days after the incident, and the incident is pointed out in the words 'few days before' in the speech, So, it is deduced that the same incident mentioned above is referred to in the speech.

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race' (*Galeez Nasal k Keere*) for the French people. Following her provocation, the audience raises highly controversial slogan of 'Beheading is the only punishment for those who insult Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)' (*Gustakh-e-Rasool ki ak hi saza, Sir tan s Juda Sir tan s Juda*). Here, the effective use of sloganeering technique is clearly visible. The orator finally declares Jihad as the only solution to end the threat of blasphemy. She concludes her speech with a highly provocative statement,⁷⁵ 'Write the name of God in the city of idols and write Islam wherever infidel is written. If they trample the flower of friendship, then, on each branch of the flowered tree, write 'genocide for all that disagree'.⁷⁶ From any conceivable perspective, this is radical indoctrination, carried out effectively by a woman through provocation of a religious emotion and sentiment, namely Muslim's love for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).⁷⁷ By critically analyzing this speech, I am of course not suggesting that Muslims should remain silent over cases of blasphemy committed ignorant factions in the Western world. Such acts that deliberately provoke Muslims and hurt their sentiments are indeed highly condemnable. However, inciting the masses to raise their arms is not the way to go. What can and should be a suitable reply for such acts of transgression, ought to be discussed first by moderate Muslim intellectuals and the response should be jointly determined by leaders of the Muslim world. However unfortunately, it has been observed that in Pakistan, blasphemous laws

⁷⁵ In Urdu, she stated that, '*Butoon k shehr m Khuda ka nam lkh dena, Jahan pr Kufr likha ho vahan Islam lkh dena, Agar vo sulah kay phoolo ko paon talle masal dalen, Tou shakh- e-gul ki hr patti pr qatal-e-aam lkh dena.*'

⁷⁶ See, for example, Speech by daughter of Maulana Abdul Aziz indoctrinating radicalization to female students at Jamia Hafsa; Jamia Syeda Hafsa Official, "*Azmat-E-Rasool (SAW) Conference Live Khattab,*" YouTube, October 29, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhVM4TIWTq8&t=158s>.

⁷⁷ I am not arguing that Muslims should remain silent about the blasphemous attacks on Muslims by the Western world. In this case, inciting the masses to raise their arms is not the way to go. 'What can be a suitable reply for these types of issues from Muslim sides?' should be discussed by moderate intellectuals of Muslim world and should be carried out jointly by leaders in Muslim world in a legal and peaceful way.

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are frequently used against minorities, political opponents, and rivals.⁷⁸ Therefore, keeping in mind these regional circumstances and our increasingly intolerant Pakistani society, provocation of any religious fault line is clearly intended to encourage radicalization and extremism.

7.3. *Speech by Bint-e-Hussain*

In addition to the content that has been analyzed thus far, a speech by Bint-e-Hussain on the topic '*Haq ka gala dabana band kiya jaye*' or 'Stop suppressing the voice of truth' in Jamia Hafsa also offers some standout insights. This speech visibly endorses and encourages anti-American sentiments directly and anti-state sentiments somewhat indirectly. Among the many slogans that were raised in the speech, I found one slogan '*Lal Masjid ko bachane ki khatir- jaan bhi kurban, Jamia Hafsa ko bachane ki khatir – jaan bhi kurban*' (Our lives are ready to be sacrificed for the sake of Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa) particularly controversial. It appears that they are preparing their own strand of an armed militia by indoctrinating young vulnerable minds with ideas that they must be ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Jamia Hafsa and the Lal Masjid. This specific slogan was raised alongside other revered and sensitive slogans regarding enforcement of Sharia, Islamic system, finality of prophet hood, honor of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and girls' emotional attachment with women of Prophet's time. It is clear that Bint-e-Hussain, like others from the madrassa, is linking the survival of Jamia Hafsa and Lal Masjid with the preservation and propagation of the most sacred and deeply held values. They thus appear to be exploiting the emotional and religious sentiments of the students, female students in particular, for their own vested interest. She ends her speech with a clear threat and direct warning to the state institutions: 'what do you think that by closing Jamia Hafsa,

⁷⁸ "Pakistan: How the Blasphemy Laws Enable Abuse," *Amnesty International*, December 21, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2016/12/pakistan-how-the-blasphemy-laws-enable-abuse/>.

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you will create peace in the country. No, remember if you conspired against these madrassas and masjids, then there will be increased instability in the country'.⁷⁹ These last sentences of the speech thus clearly indicate a threat of violent extremism in the country, if the state ever tried to challenge madrassa authorities' motives and activities. The above-mentioned speeches clearly reveals how leading figures of Jamia Hafsa challenge the state's writ through narrative and story building with the use of complex metaphors, emotionalism, and sloganeering techniques.

7.4. Social Media Accounts of Jamia Hafsa

Jamia Hafsa appears to have adopted the modern modes of communication and have a strong presence on social media where they actively propagate their highly divisive and objectionable views. Not only is their YouTube channel visibly controversial, but a visit to their Twitter and Facebook handles, especially social media accounts of the likes of Tayyiba Dua (when it comes to women's radicalization specifically), will reveal emotional narrative building and highly radicalized content. To take an example, a video on the Facebook account of Tayyiba Dua shows the girls from Jamia Hafsa protesting and trying to provoke female police officers, they can clearly be seen raising slogans and even verbally and harshly abusing the security officials. The security forces, on the other hand, seem to be silent and performing their duties peacefully.⁸⁰

It has long been their strategy to first radicalize their female students, and when their students create chaos and disorder, they simply declare that they did not initiate this. Instead, their students acted on their own on account of being provoked. In her booklet, Um-e-Hassan claimed the same when the girls forcefully

⁷⁹ This speech was being uploaded on some other YouTube channel than the official channel of Lal Masjid; Mukhbir Television, "*Jamia Hafsa - Bint-e-Hussain Ki Taqdir*," YouTube, October 13, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDU2q5WteqA>.

⁸⁰ Tayyiba Dua, "جامعہ حفصہ کی بیٹیوں ابھی الہہ معلمات کی رہائی کے لئے مظاہرہ کر رہی ہے،" Facebook, Video, February 9, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/tayyiba.dua/videos/409483157019257>.

occupied of the children's library.⁸¹ The same argument was also used by TayyibaDua when the female students blocked roads in Islamabad in retaliation for their teachers' alleged arrest by the state.⁸² The question to be asked here, is it really possible that students of any institution can start protests or violent activities on their own without the permission or approval of their respective authorities? And if they do, then what was the response of the disciplinary committees at these institutions? The answer will reveal the shallowness of the claims made by Jamia Hafsa. No disciplinary committees are constituted for such unlawful activities, in fact the students involved are typically praised and treated as role models.

It is worth pointing in the end that such madrassas also use children in addition to women for their agenda-setting and narrative building. The Twitter and YouTube handle of Tayyiba Dua will help illustrate this point. One can easily observe how videos and images of crying and suffering children have cleverly been utilized for emotional narrative building against the state.⁸³ In light of this analysis, it seems that a government official, in the aftermath of the Lal Masjid incident, had rightly observed that authorities at Jamia Hafsa had always used women and children as a shield to pursue their unjustified acts. Women and children grants them a degree of legitimacy and immunity that allows them to operate freely without any serious fear of repercussions.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Um-e-Hassan, *Saniha Lal Masjid*, 10.

11, 2021, ⁸² Dekhte Rehna, "جامعہ حفصہ کی 6 خواتین اساتذہ غازیب | طالبات کا احتجاج | حقائق سامنے آئے۔" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LksD6rwNc48&list=WL&index=3&t=1s..> YouTube, February

اس معصوم بچے کی ماں بھی اسلام آباد پولیس کے ہاتھوں گرنٹر "Tâyiyibā Dûa Ghāzî (@TayyibaDua), " اور نامعلوم مقام پر ہے۔ Dûa Ghāzî Twitter, February 9, 2021, 12:40, ہے جو پیدائش کے بعد سے ہسپتال بیمار رہتی ہے اور اکثر " (@TayyibaDua),

ہے۔ "ایڈمٹ ہوئی" Twitter, February 9, 2021, 12:43, <https://twitter.com/TayyibaDua/status/1359060426475069442?s=20> .

⁸⁴ Pak247, "Truth About Lal Masjid (Untold Story) Behind the Camera," YouTube, December 06, 2015,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcasEXtm9OM&list=WL&index=4>.

8. Conclusion

This paper has scrutinized the frequently overlooked issue of female radicalization within Pakistani madrassas, with a particular focus on Jamia Hafsa. By analyzing primary data such as speeches from Jamia Hafsa's social media accounts and a booklet authored by its principal, this study identifies the potential threat this female religious seminary poses in Pakistan's current militant landscape. It has found that radicalization in Jamia Hafsa is a result of carefully crafted radical and extremist narratives, that have been incorporated in their teachings, metaphorical language, comparative statements, emotive language, and storytelling.

Whether it is violent or non-violent, cases of radicalization and extremism in madrassas must be comprehensively addressed. To this end, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- i. The government should seek expert advice to manage extremist madrassas, ensuring that they do not inadvertently validate unjustified extremist demands.
- ii. Critical thinking, research skills, acceptance of alternative worldviews, and an ability to identify extremist narratives should be cultivated in madrassa students through curriculum and tutorial reforms.
- iii. Proactive measures should be taken to prevent religious fault lines from being exploited and instigators of extremism must be held accountable for their provocations.
- iv. Sectarianism, a cornerstone of religious radicalization and a leading cause of divide in the Pakistani society, needs to be adequately addressed to foster understanding and tolerance of diverse perspectives in Pakistani society.
- v. Women should be encouraged to pursue intellectual development, decide their own path, and channel their daring aspirations into positive, constructive and productive activities.
- vi. Security agencies, academics, and relevant CVE authorities must be vigilant about not just potential connections between madrassas and

militant groups but also the radical and extremist propaganda being disseminated at all religious seminaries.

- vii. Conservative practices of restricting women to homes and religious schools alone needs to be discouraged at the national level.
- viii. The concept of passive secularism, cultural diversity and religious pluralism should gradually be incorporated into the national curriculum.
- ix. A counter-narrative from the educated academic class in response to the radicalized narrative of Jamia Hafsa-type madrassas is needed on regular basis. For this purpose, platforms like social media should be utilized for wider dissemination.
- x. The misuse of blasphemy cases must be scrutinized, and public awareness of such cases is crucial to prevent those exploiting these fault-lines.

These recommendations, if implemented effectively, can significantly diminish extremism in Pakistani madrassas, particularly among female students. To accomplish these goals, active collaboration between various societal factions, particularly the government and madrassa authorities, is urgently needed.