



## Youth for Interfaith Harmony Consultation June 2022

### CONSULTATION

# Promoting Narratives of Diversity, Inclusion, and Peace among Youth

Monday, June 13, 2022

Kehkashan Hall 2, Serena Hotel, Islamabad

## Consultation Report

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organized a consultation on “Promoting Narratives of Diversity, Inclusion, and Peace among Youth” on 13 June 2022 in Islamabad. The objective of the consultation was to discuss the key factors behind failure of universities in educating the youth about democracy, citizenship, and constitutionalism; to identify key drivers of religious radicalism on campuses; and to critically examine legislative efforts for youths’ development. Lawmakers, academics, religious scholars, students, journalists, human rights activists, and representatives of civil society participated in the consultation where they asked the government to build youth-centric policies. Majority of the experts also called for revival of student unions, with certain regulations, in the educational institutions of the country to discourage religious and ethnic radicalism on campuses.

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## SESSION- I

# The Educational Curricula's Interface with Constitutionalism and Citizenship

*To analyze the educational curricula's failure to educate the youth about democracy, constitution, and citizenship; Why the education system is not contributing to mass awareness about the constitution and concepts of shared identity and citizenship? Why university graduates lack basic knowledge and understanding of the constitution and democracy? Will the SNC help mitigate these problems?*





In his introductory remarks, the Director of Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), **Muhammad Amir Rana**, thanked the participants for their presence. Describing the context of the consultation, he held that one basic factor that differentiates university campuses from secondary educational institution is that the former offers more freedom to students to learn and innovate. Hence, the motivating factor behind the conduction of this consultation was to explore how much freedom is available to students and what its effects are. Findings from the PIPS project revealed an interesting fact that the space available to university

students for political expression is very limited; teachers discourage political discussion in classrooms and university administrations put a ban on any political expression and affiliation among students.

Mr. Amir Rana shed light on the double standards in our education system as the environment on the campuses is very politicized. Internal politics is widespread among teachers and administrators, and it is also affecting their performance. However, they are not willing to give students freedom to express themselves. He told that owing to this internal politics, PIPS faced a lot of hurdles in engaging educators for the consultation as they prefer to engage only with likeminded individuals and avoid any platform where there will be diversity of views. He questioned if teachers themselves cannot engage in healthy debates, how can they encourage constructive discussion among students.



**Dr. A. H. Nayyar**, physicist and author, shed light on the problem of absence of constitutional education in Pakistan. More often than not, questions are raised regarding how teachers promote democracy and constitutionalism in the classroom. To answer this, Dr. Nayyar stated that the first educational conference was held in Karachi, soon after independence of Pakistan, where it is quoted that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah said “What we have to do is to mobilize our people and build up the character of our future generations. There is an immediate and urgent need for training our people in the scientific and

technical education in order to build up future economic life, and we should see that our people undertake scientific commerce, trade, and particularly, well-planned industries.” Departing from Quaid’s vision, the then education minister somehow assumed that we needed to focus on spiritual education and its template had to be in accordance with Islamic values.

Explaining further, Dr Nayyar emphasized that the idea of an educational system based on Islam gained more traction after the disintegration of Pakistan. In the post-1971 era, as Islam occupied the central place in the national discourse, Pakistan redefined its foreign policy, leading to the gradual shift from South Asia to the Middle East and Central Asia. From then onwards, religious affiliation has featured as a vital tenet of the country’s foreign policy. Such policy choices led to the Islamization of education in schools and colleges.

Since then, the emphasis has been on the citizens’ Muslim identity and that they should live life according to the teachings of Islam. General Zia-ul-Haq made the Islamized education a permanent feature of Pakistan’s national educational curriculum. After the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment, while the education has been

devolved as a provincial subject, the introduction of Single National Curriculum (SNC) with the objective of uniting the nation seems a continuation of the same policy. Unfortunately, SNC received flak for its focus on ideology or Islam, and it has remained a debatable topic on various platforms since its launch.

Highlighting the positive upshot of these developments, Dr Nayaar informed that the new syllabus of SNC has an increasing attention on citizenship education to promote democracy and socio-political aspects of society. In the latest syllabus of the SNC, the idea of citizenship education is teemed with rationality. However, the question of implementation is still there.

Dr Nayaar believed that the Pakistani society is the victim of an absolute majoritarian mindset. Therefore, religious minorities feel victimized. With Islamization of education, violence on campuses due to religious differences is growing. More worryingly, the illiterate, and the uneducated people are far more intolerant as they consider blasphemy a justifiable reason for violence.



Speaking on the subject of constitutional education in university, **Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy**, renowned physicist and educationist, shed light on poor reading habits of students. Therefore, they have a limited worldview and most students cannot express themselves. However, he believed that equal blame falls on teachers who do not provide these students the basic critical thinking skills and instead encourage cramming. Similarly, he held the education system responsible for radicalizing students as students are well aware of their religious obligations but have never been educated about their civil obligations. With no understanding of their constitutional rights and duties, and this overdose of religious education, they are bound to be radicalized.

Dr. Hoodbhoy recommended a thorough revision of the education system starting from curriculum to our assessment system to the decision-making mechanism in the university. He recalled the contemplative and discussion-oriented environment in campuses before banning of the student union. He held that in the past, student unions used to encourage healthy intellectual discourse around political ideologies. Its banning has polluted our campuses with politics on religious and ethnicity. Violence has taken the place of dialogue and discussion. He strongly recommended giving voice to the student bodies and revive unions in the campuses.



**Dr Khalid Masud**, Judge, Shariah Appellant Bench, Supreme Court of Pakistan and a senior educator, connected the growing radicalization in society with the three level of disconnect: first between policymakers and researcher, second between the religion and science and third between the social realities and the social science research. He commended PIPS for bridging the first disconnect by arranging a consultative platform where educators, students and policymakers can confer on the diagnosis and solutions to the issues at hand.

Talking on the second disconnect between science and religion, Dr. Khalid mentioned three schools of thought in Muslim intelligentsia regarding the scientific modern development.

The first embraced science as an essence of truth while the second held that religion is the only source of absolute truth and, hence, rejected scientific knowledge. The third adopted a middle path, treating science and religion as different domains of the knowledge. Dr. Khalid also pointed out the disciplinary divide in our universities. During medieval period, education was interdisciplinary. With division in university among disciplines, a disconnect between different disciplines has been created. The post-modern development encourages bridging this disciplinary gap.

Finally, he talked on the disconnect between subjective and objective knowledge limiting social science research to issues not aligning with realities. Dr. Khalid explained that in natural sciences, objective knowledge is extracted through quantitative methods while qualitative methods are treated as subjective and biased. Interestingly, as social sciences adopt the scientific methodology, they faced a dilemma as social realities are too complex to be quantified. They cannot overlook qualitative method. Hence, in majority of social science research, while defining a phenomenon there is an overemphasis on genus and neglect of differentia. We define radicalization and extremism on the basis of what has already been defined in west, without paying attention to the social context and dynamics of our region. Consequently, we have failed to come with practical solutions to these problems.



The Chief Guest of the session, **Ms. Romina Khursheed Alam**, Special Assistant to Prime Minister of Pakistan, praised PIPS efforts and suggested to share the copy of the national report with her so she can go through it more extensively. She said, Parliamentarians are representatives of people and are not someone external to this society. So, the radicalized politics we are seeing today is reflective of similar radicalization in the society. She claimed that the legislators are well aware of the issue and the assemblies are trying to find policy solutions to the problem of radicalization among youth. She gave examples of the two bills she has presented before the national assembly, first related to the violence on minorities and second on violent extremism. She also mentioned an MoU signed between government and universities to include education on constitution and liberalism.

Ms. Romina Khursheed Alam shared her own experience as a Christian kid, as she has only recently embraced Islam. She recalled how she was never inquired about her faith in the school and her only identity was being a Pakistani. She, however, agreed that her children faced discrimination due to their faith, showing that the society has gradually segregated along religious lines.

Nevertheless, she rejected the notion of “inter-faith harmony” and proposed using the concept of social cohesion. She held that we have borrowed this concept of inter-faith harmony from the West, that focus specifically on religious divide, missing the social dynamics behind such division. She further rejected the concept of “minorities” on the ground that the term segregate society based on numerical strength, which is against the spirit of constitution. She asserted that the constitution of Pakistan acknowledges that all citizens of Pakistan are equal, irrespective of their religious affiliations.

Referring to PIPS survey question on the media exposure of students, Ms. Romina criticized the role of media for focusing on ratings rather content quality. She pointed out that in the past, the entertainment

industry was educative: even our dramas had lessons related to social relations and real-life issues and it used to promote cohesion and bonding. Now our entertainment industry promotes content full of *Saas-Bahu* rivalry and stories of extra-marital affairs and love triangles. We want to watch talk shows where politicians abuse each other. She shared that she wanted to talk about her work with an NGO on social development, but no TV channel wants to do a program on it. She recommended setting our priorities right, claiming that all segments of society, including parliamentarians and media person should play their part in creating a more tolerant society.



The second chief guest of the session, **Dr. Muhammad Ali**, Vice Chancellor of Quaid-e-Azam University assured audience of his support to student politics. He clarified that university administration never banned student union and they fully support constitutional and citizenship education. It was government that banned unions and it is government that devise curriculum for our institutions, which promote division and discord. The university is bound by the decision of government. Unlike global world, universities in Pakistan are not independent entities and we are to get even our courses and programs

approved from Higher Education Commission (HEC).

Dr. Muhammad Ali highlighted that the solution to most of our problems are in the history and culture of this region. He gave examples from Sufi teachings that promote inclusion and cohesion and held that we never focused on these teaching and did not include them in our curricula. He agreed with other speakers of the session about the problems in curriculum an teaching approaches and recommended revising the curriculum, training teachers, and initiating career development program in the campuses.

## SESSION- II

# Radicalization on Campuses: Diagnosis, Prevention, and Future Scenarios

*To discuss and identify key drivers of religious radicalism on educational campuses; Is the problem systemic or sporadic? Role of teachers, political parties, and state authorities in promoting or mitigating extremism on campuses; what potential scenarios lie ahead if the status quo continues?*



**Dr Khalid Masud**, Judge, Shariah Appellant Bench, Supreme Court of Pakistan, initiated the talk where he left in the first session, pointing out problems in our ability to define terms. He said, “We usually follow the concepts of radicalization and extremism created in the Western context, mostly after 9/11.” He shared his findings that out of 34 studies on the subject conducted by Pakistanis, 8 did not have any abstract definition at all while others relied on definition developed in non-Pakistani context.

Shedding light on the history of this divided approach in research, he shared that from the times our education was influenced by works of Greek philosophers to the time we borrowed modern education system from our colonial masters, the region has been following an either/or approach negating any form of knowledge that comes outside the defined boundaries. Following the same pattern, the education system in Pakistan was built on duality. All efforts in the Pakistani history to Islamize education had a political motive. Consequently, the actual research on Islam could never take place. Dr Khalid held that the solution to this problem lies in reviving the Islamic tradition based on a true understanding of the religion.



**Ms. Romana Bashir**, Human Rights and Minority Rights Activist, highlighted the issues faced by the religious minorities in Pakistan. She shared that she regularly has to hear the term “Dhimmi” for non-Muslims, despite the fact that the constitution of Pakistan accepts non-Muslims as equal citizens. She cautioned against defining nationalism along religious lines, explaining that this creates divide and segregation in the society. She shared that many Hindu and Christian students fear openly declaring their religious identity in public. This fear has become a normal phenomenon in the society where minorities cannot react to the

discrimination they face because they fear to be declared traitor. With Islamization of education, Romana held, students from minority communities cannot promote their thinking, perspective, and beliefs in educational institutions.

Explaining the context and rationale behind demand for joint electorate, Romana explained that the absence of political leadership after the incident of Shanti Nagar, it was realized that there is need of true representation of Minorities in the assembly and, hence, the law for joint electorate was passed during the Musharraf regime. She further clarified that in Pakistan, reversing a policy for marginalized segments of society is very difficult and only a dictator (Gen Pervaiz Musharraf) was able to do it. Despite passing of law, the political parties still follow the separate electorate system. Romana held that for



building an inclusive society, a quota-based system is a necessity. Educationist and columnist **Dr. Naazir Mehmood** held that the diagnosis of the problem is important and charged the state for being responsible for the growing radicalization in the society. He held that the state has been endorsing a typical historical narrative, in which warriors are idolized and scientists and educationists in our history are neglected. He asserted that state should have nothing to do with religion which is a personal matter between an individual and the Almighty. He held that



radicalization has three key aspects, educational, social, and religious and we need to focus on each of them to reach at a comprehensive understanding of the problem.

**Mr. Khursheed Ahmed Nadeem**, renowned scholar, media person, and columnist, initiated his talk with a question that frustrates us all: How can we stop this fast paced fall to a state of destruction with every day getting worse than the previous one? He explained that the mindset of Muslim community has been developed in a way that defines humans as a religious entity. In reality, humans have multiple identities: social, political, humanist etc. But Muslim treat humans as religious animal. Since our intelligentsia focused on the religious essence of human, we tried to define everything with standardization of religion. With religion as standards, all humans that do not fit that standard are treated as alien. This alienation of non-Muslims keeps the social system disturbed unless they either adopt the standard of Islam or die. Interestingly religion does not endorse this standardization. Khursheed Nadeem educated the participants of difference between Islam and Islamic thought, latter being a human construct. Islamic thought cannot be the final verdict. This idea that humans as religious animal is an Islamic thought and is not aligned with the concept given by Islam.



Khursheed Ahmed Nadeem held that humans are indeed social animal, as Aristotle claimed, and religion is just a tool to create an ideal human being and to build an ideal social system. He gave example of the Quranic concept of *Ibad-ur-rehman* as ideal humans. Mr. Khursheed believed that after recognizing humans as social animal, religion only expects us to fulfill three prerequisites to establish a peaceful society: democracy, welfare state and diversity.



**Dr. Salma Malik**, Assistant Professor, DDSS, Quaid-e-Azam University held that the Quaid-e-Azam University is a microcosm of Pakistani federation and her experience as a teacher of this university can help her understand the social dynamics in the entire country. She shared her experience of watching students perform folk dances which she believed is an expression of defiance from the students. The aggression and loud music, in her observation, is a response of being unheard. She held for an educator a student murdered by militants or a student abducted and killed by the state forces is an equal loss for she can relate to the problems and perspectives of both. According to Dr. Salma, there is lack of will among the authorities to deal with these problems. In strategic studies, a subject she taught in QAU, the critical thinking has reduced while students are becoming agitated and frustrated. The sanctity of educational institutions is eroding. "If we do not reevaluate our policies and do not recognize glaring realities, the problem of radicalization and extremism would linger on and on and will get worse over time," she cautioned. She supported more focus and investment on social sciences as necessary to build a critical and harmonious society.



**Dr Qibla Ayaz**, Chairman, Islamic Ideology Council and the chief guest of the second sessions, linked the current situation of Pakistan with the Soviet War and War on Terror in Afghanistan. He held that Pakistan's policies after the Soviet invasion were formed on ground of concepts such as *Al-wala wal-Bara* that promoted segregation in society in the name of religion. Dr. Qibla appreciated the points raised by the discussants and held that the while the diagnosis is apt, we lack the practical approach in dealing with the issues diagnosed. He also held that the capitalist system of economy had transformed educational institution

into profit making enterprises where students have become customers and the student-teacher relationship based on mutual respect has damaged. Universities is not a degree awarding institution but rather an environment that endorses research and discussion. Dr. Qibla held that unless Pakistan makes a policy to reverse this entire situation, our efforts would remain superficial and will not root out the problem.

Dr Qibla concluded his remarks by commending *Paigham-e-Pakistan* as a great achievement in the sense that clerics from all sects jointly declared the use of private Jihad and Takfir as non-Islamic. However, he raised questions about the way forward as despite efforts by Islamic Ideology Council (IIC) to get *Paigham-e-Pakistan* endorsed from the parliament, it has not yet been adopted by the government of Pakistan as a joint resolution of the parliament, limiting its benefits to the country.

## SESSION- III

# Youth in Policy Discourse and Formulation

*To critically examine legislative efforts for youths' development and welfare; Why youth figure poorly on state's priorities? Is the state adequately sensitized about the extent of the youths' problems and what policy measures have been taken to check the deteriorating quality of public education?*





**Dr Salma Malik** initiated the third session with her proposal to invest more on the baseline education and to train students for the international market. She also recommended universities to build partnerships with government and civil society groups to restructure the social science research culture in a way to reward students for conducting quality research in support of the societal development. She highlighted growing drug use among college and university students. Thus, career counseling and incubation support initiatives are needed to give students a sense of identity and empowerment, foster emotional stability in them,

and guide them in achieving the academic goals. “Such initiatives can play an effective role in maintaining a conducive environment for learning on the campuses” she concluded.

**Dr. Abid Hussain Sial**, Associate Professor at NUML, held that while the diagnosis of the growing radicalization in university campuses is correct, the solution lies not at the site of the symptom i.e., university, but rather at the school level from where a student adopts this culture of might is right. He held that the teaching methods at the school level promotes cramming and discourage students from critical thinking. The system divides students based on their academic performance, judging all with one parameter and neglecting ones that do not fit the defined standard. There is little or no focus on skill development such as communication skills, intellectual skills, or critical thinking skills. Dr. Abid Hussain criticized the transformation of institutions to universities, as the former offers more focused and specialized form of education that produce experts in the field. Connecting gender discrimination with socioeconomic deprivations, he also denounced treating radicalization as a religious issue and present it as a social issue related to the high emotional temperature of the society. He also held the poor administration structure in the education sector to be responsible for the declining quality of education and growing frustration among students.



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Another faculty member from NUML, **Tahir Naeem Malik**, nevertheless, did not agree with the suggestion by Abid Hussain Sial of specialized education in universities as he was of the view that the key purpose of universities is to build an interdisciplinary institution where subject experts from varied discipline could work together. He also rejected the notion of gender discrimination as rooted in socioeconomic realities and held that gender adds one extra layers of vulnerability for people belonging to the lower socioeconomic strata. “A laborer man has much lesser chances of getting raped than a laborer woman,” he explained. He

believed that all decision making at the university level should be after taking input from students as they are the main stakeholders. He criticized government for making education policies against wishes of the students citing example of online education during COVID-19.

Commenting on political activism of students in the universities, **Khursheed Nadeem** held that students are being used by political parties of both right and left wing to meet their own agendas. Despite playing an active part in the politics of the country, youth lack political awareness and cannot raise voice for their rights.



introduced any youth policy.

**Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmed**, Former VC, University of Sargodha, hold a different view for he felt that student activism is the key to reducing polarization among students and for increasing political awareness among them. He held that the political leadership produced through student union was far more mature than one produced after banning of the unions. He criticized lack of attention to youth policies all over Pakistan. The last national youth policy came in 2008 and there is no update on it since then. After the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment, provincial governments were to devise their own youth policies but except Punjab, no government has

Dr. Ishtiaq defined four steps of involving students in the education policymaking: informative, consultative, collaborative, and empowering. He held that at present we are the very first level where students are just informed of the policies made by the ministry of education. The student unions fall at the very last level of involvement where students will be empowered to come up with their own policies and implement them. He appreciated Sindh government for passing bill to lift ban on student union and recommended other provinces to follow the suit. **Dr Qibla Ayaz**, Chairman Islamic Ideology Council held that the student unions impose a system of student dictatorship and do not promote democratic decision making. He suggested establishing a student parliament with a speaker and with presence of university administration. The proposed student parliament would serve as a consultative body where healthy discussion on all issues pertaining to university education should take place.



Giving his input on student unions, **Chaudhry M. Shafique**, Executive Director, Parliamentarian Commission on Human Rights, who was an active member of student union in academic life, supported Dr. Ishtiaq and held that the parliamentary performance of political leadership produced through student unions is far better than the ones that corrupted the political system through patronage and feudal politics. While he agreed that there were incidences of violence among students and some parties misuse their youth leadership, he held that if political parties could not use youth unionism in the right manner, the onus lies on the political parties and not students. He argued that we have witnessed a rise in violence on campuses after banning student unions, which is a sign that the policy is based on denial as youth activism could not be stopped. Banning student unions has only diverted youth energies to more radicalized avenues.

The Chief Guest of the Session, **Senator Walid Iqbal**, Chairperson Senate Committee on Human Rights, opened his remarks by sharing quotes from the 2008 Report by the Senate Committee of the Whole on “The need for revival of students unions in the educational institutions in the country particularly in



Colleges and Universities.” He explained that the report clarified that the Supreme Court Judgement in 1983 SCMR 1781 did not amount to indefinite banning of student unions, but the honorable judges directed in their judgement that “arrangements shall be made as soon as possible ad not later than a month to take steps for developing, restoring, or reorganizing a healthy students discussion and other activity in any form suitable to the individual institutions which might be called by any descriptions; regarding which arrangements for elections shall also be made.” Talking about his party’s policy towards youth, Senator Walid

Iqbal held that the Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaaf gain to power through youth activism. By 2013, majority of tickets were awarded to new and young candidates. He held that the past the poll system supports patronage politics in the country and, hence, only a few young PTI candidates could win elections. Hence, he recommended a throughout revision of the system to allow young participation in the politics.



Member National Assembly, **Ms. Saira Bano**, acknowledged the lack of attention to youth in the policy making community as political parties treat youth just as a fuel to run their street politics without paying attention to their issues. She criticized the budget for ignoring education and health and keeping only a meniscal portion of budget allocation for this sector. Sharing her personal observations of youth, she pointed out that we have failed in providing our future generation a direction and purpose in life. Consequently, the youth is confused and disoriented. She also criticized the political structure where democracy is not being practiced within parties and the women legislator and legislators from

small provinces have limited say in the assemblies. They just have to nod to the orders by the party leadership, making it impossible for them to bring any change even after sitting on the treasuring benches of national assembly. She prayed for the bright future of the youth of Pakistan and encouraged them to take matters in their own hands as the ones that supposed to lead them are busy playing their power games.