Rethinking De-radicalization and Rehabilitation through the Lens of Prisons: A Case of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prisons Department

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Introduction

The role of de-radicalization and rehabilitation programs, aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism, has attracted significant academic focus in the recent years (see, e.g., El-said, 2012; Hart, 2020; Kruglanski et al., 2014). Some of the initiatives that have captured much attention of the scholar and practitioner community include the 'prevent' part of the UK counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST, 2018, p. 32; Gearson & Rosemont, 2015; Heath-Kelly, 2013), the Saudi Arabia's 'Prevention, Aftercare and Rehabilitation' (PRAC; Casptack, 2015; El-Said & Barrett, 2018), and the de-radicalization programs in Indonesia (Agastia, Perwita, & Subedi, 2020; Schulze, 2008; Osman, 2014). Indeed, these initiatives significantly exhibit a shift towards a 'soft' approach to countering terrorism and violent extremism (Porgess, 2014), for which the main focus has been on the reintegration of the former (violent) extremists in the community (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018; Podder, 2012).

Pakistan has also initiated several de-radicalization programs in different settings — often referred to as 'De-Radicalization and Emancipation Programs' (DREPs) (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Khan, 2015; Zahid, 2017; see Table 1 for an overview). Since the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan, particularly the (formerly federally administered) tribal region, has been the epicenter(s) of violent extremism and its various manifestations, many of the DREPs have predominantly targeted this region. Although DREPs have produced much-desired results, many practitioners and researchers remain unconvinced regarding their effectiveness. The concerns partly arise due to the lack of empirical data that can establish a positive correlation between the programs and successful rehabilitation or reintegration. Moreover, several scholars have also highlighted the absence of any unified and institutionalized approach and/or mechanism for checking the effectiveness and sustainability of the de-radicalization and rehabilitation centres (e.g., Butt & Tuck, 2014).

To address this concern, this text 'rethinks' Pakistan's existing de-radicalization programs through the lens of prison-based rehabilitation framework(s); explicating the potential of KP prisons as an alternative mechanism for an

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institutionalized and sustainable rehabilitation process. In doing so, it identifies several vital facets of the prison system which are fundamentally developed around the very idea of rehabilitation and reintegration — the 'correctional environment'. For this purpose, the data (corresponding to November 2020) was primarily sourced from the KP Prisons Department, which facilitated a better understanding of the existing (indigenous) infrastructure and the potential of the prisons with reference to rehabilitation and post-release reintegration in the community. This contribution argues that considering the correctional environment and its related infrastructure as the primary factor influencing the behavior of 'subjects' (i.e., inmate/prisoners), the case of the KP Prisons Department would then be a logical institutionalized setup for de-radicalization and countering violent extremism. The essay elucidates the prison-based correctional procedures, primarily the educational programs (vocational, religious, and technical training), designed considering the pre-arrest and post-release employment (prospects) and community (re)integration; which, in turn, supports the correlation between the prison-based programs and recidivism.

An Overview of De-Radicalization and Emancipation Programs (DREPs)

According to Basit (2015), the overwhelming majority of the detained militants and/or those having any (in)direct association(s) with the terrorist organizations were 'youth'. Several scholars have also identified multiple socio-economic and psychological factors as the structural determinants for violent extremism and terrorism — operating at both micro and macro levels (for a detailed review, see De Mesquita, 2008; Makki & Yamin, 2020). To address these factors, it was deemed important to have a 'soft' approach that can ensure not only their 'rehabilitation' but also their successful 'reintegration' in their respective community.

Keeping the above under consideration, the efforts for rehabilitation and de-radicalization of militants in Pakistan were formally launched by the Pakistan Army in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in 2009, after the successful completion of Operation Rah-e-Rast[2] (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Noor, 2013). Later, the DREPs were extended to Punjab and different parts of erstwhile FATA (see Table 1). These programs can be categorized under four main phases: (i) Psychological counselling; (ii) changing extremist views through religious narratives; (iii) provision of (formal) education including vocational training and skill development; (iv) facilitating a smooth reintegration in the society (Basit, 2015; Zahid, 2017).

Furthermore, different civil society organizations are also involved in countering extremism; through the 'soft' approach. For instance, PAIMAN Alumni Trust has adopted an approach of 'positive transformation and engagement' of ex-extremists (see also, Makki & Akash, 2020; Zahid, 2017). However, given the scale of extremism and its multifaceted nature in Pakistan, the existing rehabilitation and de-radicalization strategies appear to be narrow in scope and insufficient against the continually evolving nature of violent extremism.

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[2] Pakistan army launched the Operation Rah-e-Rast, in May 2009, to clean up the Malakand Division (in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) from terrorists and militants.

Table 1: De-Radicalization and Emancipation Programs (DREPs) in Pakistan

No.	Name of the Centre	Target Audience	Location
1	Sabaoon and Rastoon	Juveniles	Malakand, KP
2	Mishal	Adults	Mingora, KP
3	FEAST	Females	Swat, KP
4	Sparley	Families of the militants	Tank, KP
5	Navi Sahar	Adults	Bajaur, KP
6	Sehar De-radicalization Centre	Adults	North Waziristan, KP
7	Khyber Programme (Centers)	Adults	Khyber District, KP
8	Punjab Rehabilitation Programme	Adults	Lahore, Punjab (Dysfunctional)

KP Prisons Department and Correctional Approaches

The Prisons Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, having been significantly expanded and establishing its footprints in the Newly Merged Tribal Districts (NMTDs), has served the (provincial) justice system under an institutionalized mechanism. Table 2 illustrates the number of prisons operational in the province with respect to their types, and Table 3 sheds light upon the collective population of these prisons.

The KP Prisons Department's mission is to motivate inmates through psychological, ethical, moral, & vocational teaching to become productive & law-abiding citizens.[3] More importantly, the IG Prisons Department has especially been considerate of recognizing the significance of successful community reintegration mechanism (personal communication, November 9, 2020). Consequently, a strong focus is dedicated to the 'reformation and rehabilitation' of the subjects.

Table 2: An Overview of Prisons in KP

No.	Prisons	Numbers
1	Central Prison	06
2	District Prison	08
3	Sub Jails	09
4	Sub Jails in NMTDs	15
5	Interment Centres	09
	Total	*47*

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[3] For further details, visit the KP Prisons Department Official webpage: http://www.prisons.kp.gov.pk/

Table 3: An Overview of Population and Categorization of KP Prisons

No.	Category	Under Trial	Convicts	Civil	Condemned	Total
1	Male adult	8789	2481	32	337	11679
2	Female Adult	154	33	0	01	118
3	Male Juvenile	336	21	0	0	359
4	Female Juvenile	02	0	0	0	2
	Total	9281	2535	32	378	12226
	Percentage %	75.90	20.73	0.19	3.9	-

Several formal education programs, ranging from secondary school certification (SSC) to Master's degree, are available for the purpose within the KP prisons; Table 4 presents the relevant numerical data. It is pertinent to mention here that the authorities are equally concerned about religion's potential role in defining an individual's morality and values. Therefore, special attention is being paid to religious education (for details, see Table 5). Since the misinterpretation or misuse of religious text has been well identified as a radicalization source in Pakistan (Templin, 2015), this research considers a systematic religious education mechanism as an effective way for de-radicalization. The religious education being offered at the KP prisons (re)orients itself towards mainstreaming the religious beliefs and also exposes the individuals to 'other' interpretations of the religious texts that fundamentally promote tolerance, inclusivity, and humanity — as the basic principles of Islam. A comprehensive examination mechanism is in place to assess the individual's understanding of Islam's key fundamentals and the Holy Book — i.e., Quran.

Moreover, to create an inclusive multi-religious environment within the prison, non-Muslim prisoners are encouraged to appear in examination emanating from their own Holy Books. Such a mutually shared environment promotes dialogue, critical thinking, and multi-religious coexistence. As per the data collected from the KP Prisons Department, it is indeed very encouraging to observe the increasing enrolment both in formal and religious education.

Table 4: Formal/Modern Education

Degree/Certificate	No of Prisoners
SSC	386
HSSC (F.A./F.Sc.)	286
B.A./B.Sc.	158
M.A./M.Sc.	44
Oriental Languages	1033
Total	*1907*

Table.5: Religious Education in KP Prisons

Sanad/Certificate	No of Prisoners
Nazira Quran	577
Tarjuma	93
Hifz e Quran	8
Total	*678*

In addition, the correctional approach in prison is also directed towards vocational and technical skills training. Several training courses are being offered in this regard; these enable the prisoners to acquire specific skills, such as electrical technitioning, tailoring, carpentering, computer skills, and the ones pertaining to Information Technology (IT). The main idea behind such trainings is to ensure that the individuals successfully reintegrate in the life outside the prison — i.e., post-release.

The National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTEC), the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (KP TEVTA), and other relevant government departments are also being integrated into these skill development programs. Such coordination is essential to ensure that the efforts have profound impacts on reintegrating the released prisoners in the community. While 669 prisoners have completed technical training, another 476 are presently enrolled in these programs (see Table 6 and 7). Their examinations are conducted by the relevant technical institutions recognized by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan. The prisoners' involvement in educational and training activities is highly encouraged by the KP prisons administration and are also offered certain remissions to encourage their participation in these correctional activities further.

Table 6: Individuals under Skill Development Training in KP Prisons

No.	Jail/Trade	Haripur	Bannu	Mardan	Abbottabad
1	Electric	25	80	36	-
2	Tailoring	63	77	43	-
3	Computer	29	70	-	-
4	Wood Working	19	-	-	-
5	Plumbing	29	-	-	-
6	Mobile Repairing	-	-	-	-
7	Non-woven Bags	-	-	-	05
	Total	165	227	79	05
	Grand Total				*476*

Table 7: Completed Skills Development Training in KP Prisons

No.	Jail/Trade	Haripur	Bannu	Mardan	Peshawar	Abbottabad
1	Electric	42	120	20	-	-
2	Tailoring	65	150	20	-	-
3	Computer	68	60	-	-	-
4	Wood Working	50	-	-	-	-
5	Plumbing	09	-	-	-	-
6	Mobile Repairing	-	-	-	60	-
7	Non-Woven Bags	-	-	-	-	*05*
	Total	334	230	40	60	05
	Grand Total					669

Conclusion

The existing prison infrastructure in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa produces an abstract model of interventions at a socio-economic scale; with reference to de-radicalization. It already embodies the 'correctional' mechanism that needs to be employed to carry out institutionalized efforts for countering violent extremism. Indeed, there are several (prospective) shortcomings that can be identified when considering the proposed role of prisons in de-radicalization; thus, it cannot be considered as an 'ideal' model by any means. It is a fact that our prisons are massively overcrowded, understaffed, and poorly run which ultimately may compromise the rehabilitation process.

Nevertheless, the prison-based rehabilitation model offers a clearer view of the underlying mechanisms, which can be further formalized through appropriate and timely planning and implementation of multifaceted non-linear pathways, and provision of infrastructural support which is direly needed. Similarly, this contribution acknowledges that more data is needed to fully capture the formulation of the prison-based de-radicalization and its underlying constituent components. It is further suggested that having the basic prison-based model in place, it can further be extended based on some auxiliary phases along the process of de-radicalization.

The objective here is to illustrate the dynamics of the prison system in order to envision an indigenous and institutionalized framework for de-radicalization. Such a (re)modelling necessarily demands continuous revisiting of the de-radicalization programs. Therefore, this paper does not claim that the existing correctional mechanism per se can be applied — without suitable adaptation — in the case of extremists.

Likewise, more research is also required to understand the factors and elements that can play a role in attracting the subjects towards the correctional programs as well as making their outcomes sustainable. This will also help in highlighting various facets of the KP prison-based institutional infrastructure; which is invisible to a great extent. It is also acknowledged that the preliminary analysis presented here is indeed nothing more than scratching the surface. The need of the hour is to engage the academics as well as the (security) practitioners to come up with a durable, sustainable, and institutionalized de-radicalization of the extremists.

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