

Local Religious Leaders and Peacebuilding in Fragile Context: Empirical Evidence from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract: *The influence of religion on human behavior is an undeniable fact. Faith deeply influences citizens' behavior regarding violence, peace and conflict in society. Faith can be a source of both violence and peace. However, the role of religion in violence is often discussed in literature while its functions in promotion of peace are mostly ignored. Similarly, in the conflict context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan where militants used religion for the legitimization of control and violence. While local religious actors also played a vital role in prevention of conflict and promotion of peace but that rarely surfaced in media and literature. In this vein, this study attempts to explore the religious actors' role in peacebuilding in communities affected by terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study adopted a quantitative approach and purposively selected four fragile communities of District Dir Upper and Lower of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Multiple linear regression was applied to assess the effect of various aspects (variables) of faith base peacebuilding on the level of peace. The results showed that four aspect of faith base peacebuilding, namely, peace mobilization, prevention of violence and conflict, reconciliation and trust building are the strong predictors of the level of peace while the single variable, namely, spiritual and emotional support was noted as a non-significant predictor of the level of peace. The study concluded that religious actors played a vital role in mobilizing local people towards peace, prevention of violence and conflict, reconciliation and trust building. Keeping in mind the significant role of religious base actors' role in peace it is suggested that the peacebuilding organization needs to recognize their vital role and include them for realizing sustainable peace in post-conflict settings in order to avoid relapse.*

Introduction

In the wake of September 11, 2001 religion is often seen as one of the defining features of societies in conflict (Sampson, 2007). Where religion is often debated as the motivating factor behind terrorism and other acts of violence (Coward & Smith, 2004, Sampson, 2007) resulting in an assumption that religion speaks with one voice, and tends to drive social fragmentation and conflict (Cox, Orsborn & Sisk, 2014). However, Cox, Orsborn and Sisk (2014) argue that in reality every religion demonstrates "multi-vocality". Religious traditions are largely "equivocal" and can be the source of social disorganization or integration in different state of affairs in various situations. Due to this, there can be issues, not related to religion but can easily be given a religious colour for gaining popularity to achieve certain objectives. As Sampson (2007) pointed out that in many cases the roots of conflict are often political or economic but

the revolt against status quo is expressed in religious terms to appeal religious sensibilities. Most of the world religions, being part of a culture, contain violent aspects--such as a holy war culture--that call for mobilization against evil and these religious beliefs are easily politicized and have brought harm rather than cessation of evil (Boulding, 2000). Similarly, Galtung (1990) pointed out that among the other elements of culture, ideology and religion is used for legitimization of structural and direct violence.

The relationship of religion to both violence and peace is deep. Religion is a strong constituent of cultural values and norms because it addresses most profound existential issues of human life such as faith, freedom, protection and security and right and wrong (Said & Funk, 2002). This is why most of the peace scholar has recognized its role in both peace and conflict arguing that religion acts as an intervening variable that may escalate or de-escalate violence (Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000; Dubois, 2008; Haynes, 2007; Haynes, 2009; Silvestri & Mayall, 2015; Deitch, 2020). Generally, the role of religion in a conflict situation serves two purposes: to promote religious militancy or to play a positive role in peacemaking and peacebuilding. From a sociological point of view, the challenge concerning the role of religion in conflict is not about religion per se, but rather religious extremism (Powers, 2010). Evidences show religion can be a driver of both conflict and peace. Therefore, the deep understand of religion as a fluid system of variables based on historical and contextual factors is necessary to comprehend the role of religion in conflict and peace (Silestry & Mayall, 2015). However, the peaceful facet of religion is either ignored or could not gain visibility because peace is considered normal life situation which less likely become the matter of debate. Faith base actors have various advantages over official peacebuilders because their engagement is not limited to the conflict situation as they have a long history of involvement in social affairs of the community that enhances their credibility and legitimacy which is very important in the process of establishing sustainable peace (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). Now days, most of the conflicts in the world, especially the conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia, are somehow linked to religion. Therefore, it is important to understand the role of religion not only in escalating and triggering political violence (which is widely debated) but also its potential in de-escalating violence and creation of sustained peace (Abu-Nimer, 2015, Deitch, 2020). Religion plays an important role in countering violent extremism in such society (Dubois, 2008). No religion in the world is impervious to instigate violence but the role of religion in Muslim communities in a post 9/11 context is more important as Islam is often singled out as particularly violent (Huda & Marshall, 2018) which arises the need to shed light on the role of religion of Islam and Islamic scholars in peace in their communities affected by conflict on the name of religion. Before going to discuss the role of religion in conflict Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, we need to discuss to the role of religion of Islam in peace.

Religion and Peace

One of the important elements of people's innermost lives and external behavior is religion (USIP, 2011). The issue of violence in societies affected by conflict on the name of religion by people who are often very less in number can be addressed by engaging the majority of religious persons who are not violent extremist to prevent conflict and promote peace (Dubois, 2008). Religion being part of the culture have the symbolic power to legitimize violence (Galtung, 1990) in the same way is also having the power of molding human behavior towards peacefulness. The role of religion in peace is more important in states affected by religious extremism (Huda & Marshall, 2018) because in such communities, religion is used for two purposes, to prop up religious militancy or to build peace (Powers, 2010). In order to address the problem of religious militancy, religion can offer ethical vision to motivate faith base leaders to actions for sustainable peace (Sampson, 2007). The living traditions of religion offers avenues for dialogue and resolution of conflicts peacefully. Moreover, religious communities employ their spiritual practices and ethical resources for sustainable peace (Lynch, 2003). Coward and Smith (2004) are of the view that religion being part of the local cultural values inspire long term social welfare and peace activism necessary for creating sustained peace in conflict affect societies.

Nearly all of the world religions teach peace, tolerance and harmony to its followers (Steele, 2011). Proper utilization of faith base beliefs regarding peace can result co-existence and respect for human lives. In many conflict affected societies such as Sudan and Zambia Faith Base Peacebuilders have contributed positively to peacebuilding with varying level of success in many ways. They have high faith based inspiration long term commitment, availability in society with religious and ethical authority and duty to mobilize others for peace (Bouta et al. 2005). In almost all religions of the world peacebuilding is considered a holy and peacebuilders enjoy high positions with traditional authority (Smock, 2002). Faith base actors are perceived as model, unbiased mediators who have adherence to collective religious values that exceeding other kinds of group faithfulness (Tool Category B, n.d). Faith base actors can be involved throughout the conflict cycle, in conflict prevention, in conflict resolution and in post-conflict stability and reconciliation because they have access across the swath of the country, because they are found in even the remote areas (USIP, 2011).

The duty of religious leaders is to inspire adversaries to live with peace. Spiritual and faith based movements can play vital parts in peace-building with their strong faith-based inspiration, strategic promise, religious, mystical and ethical power and capacity to assist productive social relations between dissimilar groups of people (Stassen, 1992; Thistlethwaite and Stassen 2008; Sampson and Lederach 2000, Gopin 1991). Specifically, they have the potential to, cultivate a healthy sense of belongingness, delegitimize violence promoting behavior, and encourage the processing of information that can dispel distortion and enemy imaging. Faith base efforts focus on building confidence, curing grievances, breaching the pattern of revenge, decreasing prejudices and clearing misconceptions, and establishing relations among divides so that local individuals can start work together (Steele, 2011). Activities of FBA (Faith Base Actors) are advocacy for empowering the weaker in conflict situation, intermediary/mediation through use of their good offices, observing as watchdogs of behavior that's is threatening or harmful for peace, educating and sensitizing the followers towards (Bouta et al. 2005).

Islam, Conflict and Peace

Harris (1998) reported that Islam is rarely linked with non-violence in the public mind. The fear of wide expansion of Dar-al-Islam, (the House of Islam) with its competing culture is visible in the fear contemporary westerners that they feel at the appearance in of Muslim in the contemporary conflict. This mind set is also prominent on the media while peace facet of Islam, the Islamic religion spread through out Africa and South Asia by way of merchants and teachers without any military involvement. In the post 9/11 world, the religion of Islam is often linked with conflict however, its association with peace is somehow under debated. In this regard, Smock & Huda (2009) argued that in the aftermath of 9/11, Muslim peace makers have played an important role in de-legitimization of religious militancy on the basis of religion of Islam. They have widely condemned terrorism and other violent actions, promoted interfaith dialogue, offered re-education of extremist Muslims and promoted peaceful conflict resolution.

This role of religion of Islam has recognized by some peacebuilding organization such as United States Institute for Peace. In Pakistan, USIP have engaged prominent religious scholar to address the issue of sectarian conflicts. These scholars helped in writing a peace education text book based on Islamic foundations of peace to be used in religious seminaries for teaching peacebuilding. The aim of this joint shia-sunni religious cleric project is to support the next generations on religious lines to become future peacebuilders. The USIP has similar programs of religious base peacebuilding in Afghanistan (Smock & Huda, 2009). However, these programs are mostly funded with external resources and ends with project life cycle. On the other hand there exist religious scholars which work towards peace on their own without any external support and their role is often not counted in the peacebuilding efforts. Similarly, the role of religious persons in peace of conflict affected areas of *Pakhtun* society is missing in the literature on religion and peace. Therefore, this study aims at evaluating the role of religious actors

in peacebuilding in the conflict affected areas of District Dir Lower and Upper of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Conflict, Religion and Pakhtun Society

It is popular among *Pakhtun* that they have embraced Islam as a result of a mutual decision in a Jirga (tribal leaders' council) (Naz, et al., 2012; Ali et al., 2021) and after that their socio-political life is largely influenced by Islam (Shah, 1999; Naz & Rehman, 2011). Along with religion, *Pakhtunwali*, the unwritten code of life that also helps governs *Pakhtun* society (Ahmad & Muhammad, 2019). *Pakhtun* ethnic group residing on a strategic location in South Asia of vital interest to many global power such as Russia, Great Britain and United States. This is why *Pakhtun* areas often remained a battlefield for many conflicts. The area has been the epicenter of Great Game between Great Britain and USSR (Akram, 2020). Apart from this, *Pakhtun* opposed the colonial power and were in constant conflict with British Colonial Rulers. The British through their divide and rule policy signed the Durand line agreement in 1893 with the aim to end conflict Afghan Rulers, make ex-FATA as a buffer zone for their safe travel and trade with central Asia and to minimize the risk of Russian intervention for which they support the Afghan rulers with guns and ammunition (Giunchi, 2013). Ex-FATA being kept as an autonomous frontier region governed through a British enforced law called FCR (frontier crimes regulation) which gave much power to their political agents or supporters. After the Soviet intervention in 1979 the *Pakhtun* area again remained as battlefield and breeding ground for making Mujahidin to fight against Russia with the support of USA and Saudi Arabia (Akram, 2020). Here religion was used as a motivating factors to fight against infidels Russia. This violent interplay on *Pakhtun* soil did not stop here and with the advent of 9/11 a war on terror was initiated against Taliban which were once used as Mujahideen against Russia. To escape from NATO attacks in Afghanistan Taliban started seeking shelters in the ex-FATA on the Pakistani side of the Durand line. With this a wave of talibanisation also started in Malakand division, mainly in Dir and Swat Districts where the Tehreed Nifaz-e-Shariat Muhammadi (TNSM) was already existing. Scholars links, in parts, the roots behind the existence of militancy in Malakand Division with the TNSM (Orakzai, 2011). Avis (2016) is of the view that lack of formal governance structure and judicial system along marginalization helped in the rise of TNSM.

Pakhtun are influenced by the combination of socio-cultural norms and Islamic values (Glatzer, 1998; Rome, 2008; Orakzai, 2011). Hence, the influence of religion cannot be denied in societal affairs. As discussed above religion can be used for both violence and peace. In context of *Pakhtun* society, various scholars have discussed the role of religion and militancy by pointing out to Afghan Jihad and TNSM as a religious based movement however there is dearth of studies which count the role of religion in peacebuilding. Lederach and Appleby (2010) suggest that for indigenous empowerment the local factors and people should not be seen as the problem and the outsiders as solution instead sustainable solution can be found within the setting. After all, religion is a strong source of rituals, norms and values related to most of human issues such as existence, freedom, fear, right and wrong and security and insecurity (Said & Funk, 2001). The religious traditions are vital for sustainable peace in society suffering from violence involves religious actors (Dubois, 2008). Hence, instead of considering religion as a motivating factor religion and religious actors needs to be viewed as solution to the problem too. In this vein, the current study aims at analyzing the role of religious actors in building peace in the conflict affected areas of Dir Lower and Dir Upper.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative stance for predicting the influence of various aspects of religious base peacebuilding on the level of peace in conflict affected communities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Since /11 militancy increased in federally administered tribal areas and Malakand Division of *Pakhtun* society. In order to prevent militancy, the government has launched various military operation against militants that resulted in conflict between the government and militants. For this paper, two conflict

affected districts i.e. District Dir Upper and District Dir Lower of Malakand Division were selected for data collection purposes. Data were collected from 320 respondents, the local inhabitants of the area who have witnessed the conflict. Since, the villages that had insurgents were more in number, so, data for the present study were collected from two villages of each district i.e. Samkot and Dog Payeen from Upper Dir and Gedaro and Brekanai from Lower Dir. These were the areas where the presence of insurgents was reported more during preliminary survey of the area. The total numbers of households (one person from each household) in the selected villages were taken as the potential respondents. They were the people who had good knowledge of the local situation, militancy and peace process including the role of local religious actors' role. It was noted in the preliminary survey that the total number household in four selected villages were 1908. A sample size of 320 was determined using sample size calculator (online). For allocation of the sample, proportionate sampling method (Avli, 2016) was used, given in the following table 1.

Table 1.1 Sample size

S. No	Name of the Selected Village	Household Statistics	Sample Size
1	Gedaro	406	68
2	Brekanai	581	97
3	Samkot	513	86
4	Dog Payen	408	69
Total		1908	320

For data collection a self-constructed questionnaire, translated in Urdu language, was used. Urdu is the local language and easily understood by any literate person. For illiterate person, the data was collected by the researcher himself from respondents. The questionnaire consisted of 6 variables namely peace mobilization (12 items), prevention of violence and conflict (08 items), reconciliation (10 items), building trust (07 items), spiritual and emotional support (08 items) and the level of peace (10 items). Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the construct. In social sciences Cronbach's alpha is a good means to measure the reliability of a construct (Wadkar et al., 2016). The result of Cronbach's alpha is given in the following table 2.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Statistics

Aspect of Religious base peacebuilding	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Peace Mobilization	12	.85
Prevention of Violence and Conflict	08	.82
Reconciliation	10	.85
Building Trust	07	.78
Spiritual and emotional support	08	.83
Level of peace	12	.71

Data was analyzed using multiple linear regression to estimate the effect size of religious base peace building on the level of peace in the area. Multiple linear regression is a statistical measure used to understand the simultaneous association of several variables on one variable (Eberly, 2007).

Results and Discussions

In this section results of the multiple linear regression are given along with discussion. The study assesses the affect five main variables of faith base peacebuilding namely religious based mobilization, violence prevention, reconciliation, trust building and spiritual and emotional support.

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.441 ^a	.195	.182	.68318

Table 4. Anova statistics

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	35.396	5	7.079	15.168	.000 ^b
	Residual	146.554	314	.467		
	Total	181.950	319			

A multiple linear regression was applied to predict the level of peace (as dependent variable) based on religious based peace mobilization, prevention, reconciliation, trust building and spiritual and emotional support (as dependent variables). Overall the model as significant with $R^2 = .195$, $F(5,314) = 15.16$, and $p = .000$.

Table 5 Regression Co-efficients

Co-efficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.519	.304		1.705	.089
	Peace Mobilization	.202	.057	.205	3.533	.000
	Prevention of Violence & Conflict	.144	.062	.142	2.331	.020
	Reconciliation	.229	.096	.124	2.379	.018
	Trust building	.149	.056	.162	2.682	.008
	Spiritual and Emotional Support	.035	.053	.035	.651	.515

a. Dependent Variable: Level of Peace

Further, to explain each variable, the regression results showed that peace mobilization significantly predicts the level of peace ($\beta = .202$, $p = .000$). Similarly, prevention was also found significant predictor of level of peace ($\beta = .144$, $p = .020$) followed by reconciliation ($\beta = .229$, $p = .015$) and trust building ($\beta = .149$, $p = .008$). While spiritual and emotional support was found insignificant predictor of the level of peace ($\beta = .035$, $p = .515$).

Mobilization for Peace

The results offer evidences that faith based mobilization for peace significantly affect the level of peace in the conflict settings of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In any conflict setting faith based actor play vital role in mobilization of local population towards peace as they have a number of strengths such as strong local presence and long term history of religious based motivation. The Islamic traditions are full of approaches and lessons of peace that contain rich resources for promotion of peace values, beliefs and methodologies (Abu-Nimer, 2003). Faith base actors play an active role as peace educators, observers,

advocates challenge the traditional structure and perpetual violence to bring a positive change in the behavior of people (Sampson, 1997; Tsejard et al., 2005; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Vullers, 2021). Faith base peacebuilders are working as advocates of reconciliation, non-violence and fairness in a society characterized by social and political disparities (Bartoli, 2005).

In conflict, which is mostly religiously oriented such as terrorism on the base of religion, religious peace builders have a niche to mobilize local people for peace (Bouta et al., 2002). Evidence from other conflict settings such as Nigeria and Cambodia also shows that the use of religious values, norms and teachings to inspire devotees to work together for the development of peaceful society. This is crucially important in the situation where religion is seen as a source of conflict (USIP, 2003). The spiritual and moral authority of the religious actors vested in the religious scripts, values, traditions and narratives are very important for mobilization of followers (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2008; Hynes, 2009). Mobilization of people towards peace by religious actors is also found in conflict context of other Muslim societies around the world such as Huda et al., (2011) reported that Islamic organization have taken an active part in mobilizing the masses through preaching in mosques for peaceful resistance and social justice. Hence, religion can not only be used for mobilization of militant groups but as well as for mobilization of people to remain non-violent and resist peacefully. Within the conflict setting the religious teaching regarding tolerance is very important as the victims may also adopt a violent path and can take law in hands. The religion of Islam speaks about tolerance and patience to its followers. Ali et al (2021) explained the concept of tolerance and patience in Islam by noting the terms *sabr* and *hilm* in the Quran used that demand patience, tolerance, stay calm and steady, not to be reactive or repressive. Another similar term *tahamul* is used for patience (*sabr*) speaks about patience and tolerance in an uncertain situation. The religion of Islam stresses tolerance and patience (Huda et al., 2011). Hence, it will not be wrong to say that in creating harmony and peace the Islamic principles of tolerance and patience are powerful means to remain calm and steady. It gives strength to affected population to avoid any regressive response and be optimistic about a peaceful future. This in line with the views of Huda (2006) and Bouta et al. (2005) who revealed that Muslim peace builders now days are engaged in work of human rights, dialogue, peace education and political activism among youth. Likewise, Huda (2006) and Smock (2002) have noted that Islam is the religion of peace and Islamic principles of peace are based on forgiveness, patience, tolerance and pluralism. Mobilization for peace based on Islamic philosophy contains fairness in conduct, doing good, universality of humanity, love of humanity, sacredness of human lives, equality and the pursuit of peace as a sacred duty of every human being (Huda et al., 2011). Religion is a good tool for mobilization of both peace and violence as Boulding (2000) argues that religion as part of culture encompass violent aspect, for example the holy war culture that offer mobilization against evil however these religious beliefs are easily politicized and bring harm rather prevention of evils. Likewise Galtung of the view that there exists religious norms and values which legitimize but at them same time such religions contain norms and values that offer peaceful resolution of issues hence it is an appropriate way to address the religious based violence through a religious based peace approach which is often more acceptable to the local population especially religious based conflicts. Because in such societies religious based actors have high faith base inspiration, long term commitment and ethical duty and authority to mobilize followers for peace (Bouta et al., 2005).

Prevention of violence and Conflict

The second significant predictor of the level of peace was the prevention aspect of peacebuilding. The results showed that various activities of the prevention of violence and conflict by the religious actors is a strong predictor of the level of peace. Prevention include the activities and strategies targeted at the voidance of violence and causes of conflicts. Prevention occurs at three levels namely pre, during and post conflict situation (Melander & Pigache (2007). As conflict often offers further opportunities of violence during emergency, displacement and rebuilding process (Bastick et al., 2007). Women and

children are the most affected segments of society in such situation (Akseer et al., (2020) where prevention activities are direly needed. In this context Religious based prevention is more effective because of its sacredness as the religious actors mostly use religious teachings to prevent violence and promote peace. Prevention activities included the identifying the potential factors that can cause violence, persuading community to refrain from violence, be resilient, keep themselves away from violent groups, chase of fairness, the universality and self-worth of humanity, consideration of human life as sacred, and not to indulge in any activities that harm any other person or his assists being their religious duty and finally doing good and support others in time of trouble being their religious duty (Huda et al., 2011). In this regard, Bouta et al., (2005) reported that in conflict situation religious based peacebuilders are seen mostly against the violent conduct of the affected population and act as watchdogs of the behavior which harmful for peace. In certain situation they come in between the conflicting parties to stop conflict because of their spiritual authority due to which people accept their request and respect them (Chapman and Kagaha, 2004; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). They were mostly against terrorism and activities of militants on the name of Islam in the area. It was clear that the local people didn't support any religious regime based on fear and violence. Prevention of evil deeds is part of the common understanding and duty of every Muslim which is called *Amar Bil Maroof wa Nah e Anil Munkar* (direct people towards good deeds and forbidding them from evil deeds) (Hayat et al., 2019) the basic philosophy of Islam for ensuring justice and peace (Rahman, 2021). The spirit and motto of these principles is to promote good, truth, justice and forbid violence, injustice and other evil deeds and is considered the duty of every Muslim (Erdogan et al., 2020). Steele (n.d) also reported that religious leaders, flourish a health sense of belongingness, reduce biases, delegitimize violent behavior and make clear the misconceptions that falsify images of rivals. Likewise, Henkil and Traore (2020) have argued that religious actors not only help in the mediation process but they also have the capacity to contribute in the prevention of conflict and termination of violence.

Reconciliation

The thirds predictor of the state of peace was religious based reconciliation. This included convincing people toward dialogue, providing space for dialogue, acting as mediators, facilitation of communication between conflicting parties, government and miscreants, supporting disarmaments and reintegration, bringing the government and local population on the table of dialogue and speaking against military operation as well as miscreants to leave the area without resorting to violence. Reconciliation is one of the immense challenge in the pursuit of sustainable peace (Peuraca, 2003). Reconciliation among former enemies or adversities with in conflict setting and in the post conflict setting is one of the major peacebuilding task (Haynes, 2009; Sandal, 2017). Religion is often thought of as a source of conflict, however in many conflict religion has been a source of peace contributed to dialogue and the establishment of peace and reconciliation (Deith, 2020). Religious based reconciliation is based on the concept of dialogue, apology, forgiveness and breaking the cycle of revenge to establish healthy relationships between former adversaries with the aim to end bloodshed (Huda, 2006). Parties in conflict have higher trust religious mediators because of the religious and spiritual authority (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). Considered as legitimate, credible and trusted, the religious actors use various strategies to convince parties at conflict to reach a mutual agreement (Batoli & Jebashvili, 2005). The religious actors do use the religious script, values, rituals, practices and stories to emphasize on the significance of peace, justice and reconciliation (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2008; Hynes, 2009).

Further their main focus is not only to dig out the root causes of dispute but aim at repairing the broken relationships for an integrated society. Religious actors being the mediators bridge the communication gap between actors and listen both the parties and explain their positions, especially of victims to create an atmosphere for empathy and forgiveness (Nichols, 1994; Appleby, 2006; Gopin, 2005; Ellis & Terhar, 2005; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, Sandal, 2017). Reconciliation based on religious tradition is

an increasing area of peacebuilding field where actors work as peace mediators to resolve issues between parties at conflict through dialogue (Abu-Nimer & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2005; Tsejard et al., 2005; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). Within reconciliation disarmament and reintegration of former combatants is important (UNICEP, 2011) where religious peacebuilders strive to make reconciliation between former warring factions to achieve the goal of social cohesion (Bouta et al., 2005; Haynes, 2007; Haynes, 2009) as well prevention of conflict in future (Hinkel, & Traore, 2020). Appleby (2006) argues that religious base peacebuilders are more successful when they have an international reach or links, emphasize on avoidance of violence and have positive relations with different religious groups in the conflict settings. Apart from this Bouta et al., (2005) have also reported the efforts of faith base actors that influence the government to start talk with rebels in Mozambique. One of the important point that religious base peacebuilder is lacking is the formal training regarding peace and conflict resolution that rises the need to involve them in getting trainings of modern techniques of conflict resolution that can further strengthen their peacebuilding capacities (Duboi, 2008).

Building Trust

The fourth predictor of the level of peace was the religious based trust building among the affected population. This included building trust among former combatant on the community and government, self confidence and trust on one's potentials, hope for a better future, loyalty and faithfulness, trust of the affected population on government, trust among people in the community, and trust of their leadership. It is in consonance with the findings of Morgan (2005), who reported that the task of peacebuilding should be, to eliminate the mindset that compels people to distrust their socio-political environment. The role of religious actors in building trust among people is very important in the fragile context where state is often weak to gain trust (Suprpto, 2015). The faith base peacebuilders strive to rebuild community trust and encourage establishment of peaceful healthy relations between former adversaries (Haynes, 2009). The religious peacebuilder applying the Islamic principles of trust which that human life or his potential on the earth is an Amanat (trust) he should live his life and use his authority and power in the best interest of human life (Gada, 2014) refrain from violence and harm. Religious base actors strive to build healthy relationship among their followers based on such trust (Bouta et al., 2005). As part of trust it is the duty of every person including religious actors rightly utilize their potential for building a strong community that is based on helping rather than harming each other. Religious leaders flourish a health sense of belongingness, reduce biases, delegitimize violent behavior and make clear the misconceptions that falsify images of rivals hence increasing trust (Appleby, 1999). Another important factors related to trust is the trust of local community on the peacebuilders that the religious actors enjoys the most (Hinkel & Taraore, 2020). As the religious actors have a long history of engagement and service in the community affairs due to which the local community have more trust on the religious actors in comparison to official peacebuilders (Berocovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, Hynes, 2009). Scholar argue that the peacebuilding capacity of the religious peacebuilders is actually in the trust and credulity they enjoy in their communities (Lepomaki 2017; Hinkel & Traore, 2020).

Emotional and Spiritual Support

The only non-significant predictors noted in the model were the spiritual and emotional support by religious actors. It was noted that spiritual and emotional support, however one of the important factors in the conflict situation but had the value of more than .05 deemed as non-significant predictor of the level of peace. This may be due to the conflict and emergency situation in which mostly people are in search of physical and biological needs and mainly concern with reduction of violence and prevention of conflict instead of getting emotional and spiritual support. In contrast to this, Sampson (2007) have noted that the presence of faith base actors during the period of conflict who address the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of affected population. Likewise, Rasul (2009) have also noted the role of religious figures in provision of spiritual and emotional support to local communities. This confirms Boege (2006)

findings who accounted involvement of faith base peacebuilder not only in handling conflicts on material issues but also deal with their feeling and spiritual world. Emotional and spiritual support is very strong that material one because of their authority vested in tradition and principle spiritually that people accept and respect them in their community (Chapman and Kagaha, 2004). Smock (2002) argued that within most religion peace building is a sacred duty of religious leader because of their key spiritual position in society. While, in conflict situation of *Pakhtun* society this might have been addressed close family members, relative and other community members as the *Pakhtun* community is a collectivist with a strong sense collective life under its oral code called *Pakhtunwali*. *Pakhtunwali* has a sense of social responsibility with a collective welfare system at community level in time of trouble and occasions of happiness called *Gham Khadi* (Ahmad & Muhammad, 2019)

Conclusion

The available literature showed the association of religion with both violence and peace however it is noted the violent association mainly gets the attention of the scholars while its role in establishing sustainable peace is rarely discussed. Similar is the case of *Pakhtun* society, which is suffering from a religious based militancy since decades and where the influence of religion and culture is very strong in comparison for formal laws. This study concludes that religious actors played a vital role in the conflict affected communities of *Pakhtun* society. Taking in account the five variables namely mobilization for peace, conflict and violence prevention, reconciliation, trust building and provision of spiritual and emotional support to the victims, the religious actors contributed significantly on the first four variables to establishing sustainable peace while the provision of spiritual and emotional support remained non-significant predictors of peace. The religious actors' peace efforts are mainly based on the scripts, values and practices based on religion and training them to have modern conflict resolution techniques will help further strengthen their peacebuilding capacity on sustainable basis. Moreover, the study suggest that the dream of sustainable peace can be realized by acknowledging religious base actors' peace efforts and involving them in the peace efforts of both the national and international actors. Religion can be a very source of social control to discourage evil doings and promote reconciliation, forgiveness and doing deeds necessary for social cohesion.

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