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Why Indian Muslims Reject Extremist Doctrines

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Executive Summary

- ◇ While India has the second largest Muslim community in the world – numbering about 180 million – it has astonished observers that Indian Muslims have refused to join the cohorts of trans-national extremism that have attracted thousands of youth from different Muslim countries and communities across the world over the last few years.
- ◇ This phenomenon is particularly impressive given that, while extremist violence in Kashmir has been ongoing for three decades, Indian Muslims in the rest of the country have consistently refused to join the insurgency there.
- ◇ This Insight examines several possible reasons – doctrinal, cultural and political – to explain this aloofness from faith-based violence. It discusses the belief-systems and practises of 'popular Islam' in India, particularly the influence of Sufism, the veneration of saints, and the insistence that matters of faith remain part of personal conviction rather than agitated in the public domain.
- ◇ The Insight then examines the shaping of India's contemporary political culture whose syncretic values and accommodativeness are enshrined in the constitution and are protected by strong watchdog institutions such as the independent judiciary, free media and a vibrant civil society. These have imbued the nation with a culture of pluralism, that, despite robust challenges, remains resilient and refuses to accept non-tolerant and extremist assertions across the communal landscape.
- ◇ Finally, the Insight provides some 'lessons' from the Indian experience that could be useful for other countries in the Middle East and the Gulf that are shaping approaches to de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation.

The Issue

When the call went out for Muslims to join the 'global jihad' in Afghanistan in the 1980s, about 100,000 responded from around the world. None, however, was from India. Indian Muslims also kept aloof from the transnational jihad led by Al Qaeda in the 1990s and later, after 9/11, through local affiliates in West and South Asia.

After the advent of Daesh, about 200 Indians responded to its call.¹ It was reported that 22 people went to Syria to fight, while another group of 25 (from the state of Kerala) migrated to 'Khorasan', the Daesh enclave in Afghanistan. The rest were engaged in online activity, either accessing Daesh material or disseminating it to facilitate further recruitment.

This aloofness of Indian Muslims from Daesh contrasts sharply with the latter's ability to attract about 30,000 militants from outside Iraq and Syria, with recruits joining its ranks from West Asia and North Africa, Central and Southeast Asia, and from Europe.

Indian Muslims have rejected trans-national jihad despite concerns that communal polarisation has increased in the country from the 1980s, along with sporadic violence directed at them from sections of the majority community and a perceived sense of marginalisation from the mainstream of the nation's political and economic life.

While several recent studies examine the possible radicalisation of Indian Muslims in the future,² there has been little discussion about the factors that have encouraged Indian Muslims to reject extremist doctrines and their refusal to be motivated towards violent action.

The rejection of extremist doctrine and action by Indian Muslims results from India's unique syncretic traditions that have fostered an extraordinarily pluralistic culture. These values have been enshrined in the Indian constitution that has shaped the country as a secular democracy.

This has inculcated into its people a moderate and accommodative ethos, while providing the national political order with instruments for effective corrective interventions when required through the rule of law, an independent judiciary, a free media and a robust civil society.

These attributes are examined in the following sections.

Pluralistic Belief System

Islamic belief and practice have two separate streams informing the faith: the stream of orthodoxy that subjects the life of a Muslim to the norms of Shariah, with its clear beliefs and practices that affirm the truth of Islam and provide the route to success in this world and salvation in the next.³

The other stream is that of mysticism, which originated in Islam in the eighth century. In the 9th century, the mystics, forming a group, distinguished themselves by wearing an over-garment of coarse wool (*suf*), and thus came to be called Sufis.

Between the 9th and 14th centuries, adherents of different schools of Sufism set up communities of *murids* (disciples) around *pirs* (teachers) across Indian villages and towns. Sufis became the first Muslim elite to come in direct contact with Hindu masses and, over time, imbibed knowledge of Hindu mysticism as well. An important aspect of these cross-communal encounters was the veneration of graves of Sufi saints.

This practice lies at the heart of 'popular Islam' in India rather than adherence to Shariah-based orthodoxy.

The 15th century witnessed a fervent growth in Hindu religiosity, with the advent of the Bhakti movement (devotional trend) through Kabir, Guru Nanak and Chaitanya. This set up traditions of mutual exchange (and competition) between the two movements, with some Sufis even seeing similarities between Islamic and Hindu beliefs.

Malik Mohammed, an expert on Indian composite culture, has pointed out that all the major Sufi orders in India displayed a similar trajectory in their ties with Hinduism – beginning with hostility, moving on to co-existence and then culminating in tolerance and understanding.⁴

According to historian Romila Thapar, Sufi teachers played a central role in the interaction with Bhakti sects and gave Indians a unique belief-system. This consisted of teachers who, brought up either as Hindus or Muslims, gave up the formal tenets and rituals of their faith and propounded devotion to a personal god, while emphasising social ethics, social equality and tolerance. This was the faith of most Indians, Hindus and Muslims, for 500 years.⁵

This period was marked by close interaction between India's diverse communities. As scholar Dr Tara Chand points out:

"As the storm of conquest abated and Hindus and Muslims began to live as neighbours, the long association led to efforts for understanding each other's ideas, habits, nature, rites and rituals. Soon enough, there developed harmony between the two."⁶

Indian religious scholar, freedom fighter and political leader Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, described Islamic and Hindu cultural currents as "eleven hundred years of common history". He said:

"I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensable to this proud edifice and without me this splendid structure is incomplete. I am an essential element that has gone to build India."⁷

Saba Naqvi, a journalist and author, has described the contemporary lived experience of "cross-over" identities across India.⁸ For example, in Midnapore district of West Bengal state there are the *Patchitra* painters – Muslim artists who paint scrolls depicting Hindu gods and stories from the Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In their personal lives, they manifest both Hindu and Muslim traditions.

In the Sundarbans region of West Bengal, the local people still venerate *Bonbibi*, a Muslim "goddess", reflecting a faith that is a mix of "animism, the Hindu Shakti tradition and a typically Indian brand of Sufism".

In Trichy, Tamil Nadu state, there is a temple devoted to *Thulukka Nachiyar*, which means "respected Muslim lady". She is venerated as a "consort" of Lord Vishnu.

Such eclectic traditions, born out of diverse people living together for several centuries, abound across the country, blunting the sharp edges of religious divisions with the lived experience of accommodation and harmony.

Confirming this view, Australian academic Peter Mayer, based on his personal study of two towns in southern India, rejected the view that Muslims were defined by a compulsive adherence to a monolithic "Quranic Political Culture". He pointed out that "ordinary Muslims emerge ... not as members of a monolithic community sitting sullenly apart, but as active participants in regional cultures whose perspective they share."⁹

This is reflected in a 2015 survey relating to religious attitudes and practices of different Indian communities wherein:

- 30% of Hindus and 29% of Muslims were "very religious";
- 59% of Hindus and 57% of Muslims said they were "somewhat religious"; and
- 5% of Hindus and 4% of Muslims were "not religious at all".¹⁰

Political Culture

India's syncretic tradition found expression in the constitution framed by the country's freedom fighters in 1950. It affirmed the country's adherence to its composite culture despite the fact that the country had been partitioned at independence in 1947 on communal basis, with Pakistan emerging as the 'homeland' of India's Muslim community.

Of course, Partition did pose a dilemma for the constitution-makers: a few among the political leaders did feel that independent India should give primacy to its 'Hindu' heritage and shape the new nation as a mirror image of 'Muslim' Pakistan.

Sunil Khilnani, author of the *Idea of India*, reflects this predicament thus:

"The substance of the Indian past was so diverse, so discontinuous, and often so downright contradictory that present desire, far from an embarrassing intrusion, was actually essential to discerning a pattern and order that would show it to be a 'history'."¹¹

The answer to this dilemma was found by India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the story of India's past that "told as a tale of cultural mixing and fusion, a civilizational tendency towards unification that would realize itself within the frame of a modern nation state".¹²

In Nehru's words:

"[India appeared as] an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously."¹³

It was this anxiety to protect and celebrate India's diversity, while maintaining national unity, that animated the deliberations at the Constituent Assembly. Political scientist Gurpreet Mahajan explains:

"Once the large majority [of members of the Constituent Assembly] accepted that all major religions of the world originated from India or existed in India alongside others

for centuries, it came to be seen as a condition of life there ... Under the circumstances, recognising the presence of diversity and protecting conditions that would enable diverse religious groups to survive and flourish became the primary consideration, overriding most other concerns. The violence that followed the Partition of India only lent urgency to the task.¹⁴

This vision of the Constituent Assembly enabled the realisation of India's unique contribution to the modern nation-state – the idea of secular democracy. In July 1948, Nehru wrote:

I believe in India being a secular state with complete freedom for all religions and cultures and for cooperation between them. I believe that India can only become great if she preserves that composite culture which she had developed through the ages. ... I am anxious therefore that the Muslims of India as well as other religious groups should have the fullest freedom and opportunity to develop themselves.¹⁵

Historian Mushirul Hasan has pointed out that the Constituent Assembly members might not have grasped at the time the nuances of the concept of secularism, but they were still deeply conscious that it was a 'progressive' and 'modern' ideal, far superior to the idea of a theocratic state.¹⁶ They were not concerned about the European origin of the idea but accepted its "appropriateness in a country of diverse faiths, multiple identities and varied cultural and intellectual norms".¹⁷

This secular state would not be an anti-religious state, but one in which people would rise above their narrow emotional orbit and, in former president Dr S. Radhakrishnan's words, "integrate into a multi-dimensional harmonious fellow feeling".¹⁸

For Indian Muslims, secularism has been central to their interests and welfare, a view that is accepted by traditional Muslim groups. The Jamiat-ul-Ulema promoted the idea of a social contract between Hindus and Muslims to establish the secular state, while the upholder of conservative Muslim doctrine and values, the Jamaat-e-Islami, accepted in 1970 that "in contrast to other totalitarian and fascist modes of government, the ... secular democratic mode of government in India should endure".¹⁹

In the mid-1960s, a Western scholar observed that "informed Muslim opinion is clear that it wants nothing better than the liberty to work out its own destiny within the Indian secular society".²⁰ This mindset has enabled the Muslim community to participate actively and confidently amidst the complexities and vicissitudes of Indian politics that, over the last 70 years, has been

driven by occasional challenges to the secular order and attempts at communal polarisation and marginalisation of Muslims in some parts of the country.

Indian Muslims have contended with these challenges by rejecting the idea that in national politics they function as a monolithic community; in fact, they have also rejected communal organisations and show preference for secular parties.

Recent surveys have revealed significant Muslim enthusiasm for India's democratic order, their faith in national institutions and their active participation in national politics:²¹

- In terms of voting percentages community-wise, 58% of Hindus participated in national elections in 2009 and 68% in 2014; the comparable figure for Muslims is 59%; the national average in these elections was 58% and 66%, respectively.
- While 63% of Muslims expressed faith in public institutions, it was 64% among Hindus.²²

Box 1: Triple Talaq

As part of its programme to reform some aspects of Muslim practice in India, the Narendra Modi government has prioritised the abolition of 'triple talaq', ie, the divorce of a woman by the husband reciting 'talaq' three times at one go. Muslim opinion is largely supportive of this reform measure to ameliorate the status of Muslim women victimised by this peremptory divorce.

Surveys have also shown that, despite provocations from Hindu extremist elements, the Muslim community has refused counter-mobilisation through violence or even mass protest. This rejection of mass, collective confrontation by Muslims affirms the political maturity of the Muslim community, its deep understanding of national concerns and its view of itself as an integral part of national affairs.

This is evident in two matters that have been promoted as part of the Hindu nationalist agenda – the 'triple talaq' (divorce) issue and the strident call for a ban on cow slaughter. Both have evoked no sharp Muslim response.

Hilal Ahmed, a scholar of contemporary Muslim discourse, has explained that triple talaq did not become a divisive issue since several Muslims oppose it, while consuming beef is not a particularly important matter for most Muslims.

Ahmed then examined the present-day Muslim thinking on the very contentious matter of the Babri mosque demolition, which took place in 1992 and led to widespread communal riots across the country. This issue has divided Hindus and Muslims and was a major factor in mobilising Hindu support by Hindu nationalists.

With regard to settling this dispute, there is considerable meeting of minds between the two communities:²³

- 40% of India's Hindus and Muslims accept that the mosque is either "very important" or "somewhat important", while 35% of Hindus and 32% of Muslims feel that it is either "not very important" or "not at all important"; the remaining 25% has "no answer".
- In terms of a solution, while over 30% of Hindus and Muslims want a temple or a mosque to be built on the site, it is interesting that 29% Hindus and 34% Muslims favour both places of worship being built; again, 27% Hindus and 19% Muslims have "no opinion".
- With regard to the mode of settlement of the dispute, there is remarkable consensus: 43% Hindus and 40% Muslims opt for a settlement by the Supreme Court, affirming cross-communal faith in the judiciary and the acceptance of its verdict.

Box 2: Babri Masjid

On 6 December 1992, the Babri Masjid, built in the 16th century in the Hindu pilgrimage town of Ayodhya, in Uttar Pradesh state, by a general serving the Mughal emperor Babur, was demolished by Hindu zealots. The latter contended that this mosque had replaced a demolished temple and that the mosque stood on the very space where Lord Rama was born. The mosque had been the focus of Hindu nationalist mobilisation over the previous decade; its demolition was followed by communal riots in several parts of the country, conveying the message of Hindu resurgence.

The issue of how to resolve the matter of the disputed space and the insistence by sections of the Hindus that a temple dedicated to Lord Rama be constructed on that space is now before the Supreme Court.

This reinforces the fact that over the last several centuries a syncretic culture emerged in India which brought its

diverse communities together in relative harmony. Free India enshrined this 'unity in diversity' in the country's constitution that provided a secular democratic order to the new nation, despite the partition of the country on a communal basis.

The national constitutional order has provided all citizens, regardless of communal identity, equal rights and protections, with special provisions for 'minorities', including Muslims, for the safeguarding of their unique educational and cultural interests. As a result, over the decades, Muslims have become deeply ingrained in the political and cultural ethos of their nation, in the confidence that their interests are best served by the protections provided in the nation's laws and the institutions that safeguard them.

This has also ensured that India's Muslims have not needed to look beyond national borders at other nations or institutions to protect or promote their interests.

Against this backdrop, Indian Muslims have also not experienced the allure of non-Indian doctrines or political roles to fulfil their aspirations and complete their sense of personal destiny. This has ensured their disinterest in transnational extremism and its attendant violence that has wracked West Asia and allured thousands of young Muslims into its embrace.

It is important to note that the rigidities and non-accommodativeness of the Salafi doctrines that constitute the foundations of Muslim extremist movements just do not resonate with India's Islamic traditions informed by Hanafi doctrines and Sufi teachings.

Indifference to Pakistan and Kashmir Insurgency

Another value-added dimension to this discussion is the Indian Muslims' disinterest in Pakistan and their aloofness from the insurgency in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The role of the Muslim community in the drive towards Partition is important since it impinges on the marked lack of interest of present-day Indian Muslims in viewing Pakistan either as the cherished 'homeland' of South Asian Muslims or as an alluring political, economic and cultural success story.

A quick look back at some of the events leading up to India's independence is useful.

The Government of India Act, 1935, provided for separate electorates for Muslims and other minority communities in India so that only Muslims would vote in Muslim constituencies for Muslim candidates. The Act also determined the franchise, which was different in different provinces, but ensured that only 13% of India's adult population could vote.

Under this Act, elections were held in 1937 in British-controlled India (ie, not the princely states). The Muslim League, the party spearheading Muslim separatism, won just 22% of Muslim seats (109 out of 491). It won no seats in the Muslim-majority provinces of the North-West Frontier Province and Sind and managed just one in Punjab.

The situation changed in the next round of elections in 1946. The Muslim League won 429 out of 491 of the Muslim seats, while the Congress won only 50 Muslim seats and other Muslims won 22 seats. This enabled the League and its British mentors to view the League as the exclusive party representing Indian Muslims. This has also contributed to the Hindu nationalist discourse that holds Muslims responsible for Partition.²⁴

The reasons for this drastic electoral turnaround are: one, between 1942–45, most Congress party leaders were in prison due to their 'Quit India' agitation; and, two, in this period, the League changed its posture from being a mere guardian of Muslim interests to one that now demanded a separate 'homeland' for Muslims, calling the new entity "Pakistan" in its Lahore Resolution of 23 March 1940.

But these election results are very misleading. First, large numbers of Muslims in the Indian princely states, such as Hyderabad and Kashmir, did not vote. Second, the franchise was restricted to the propertied classes, so that only six million Muslims in a total population of 79 million had the vote. Those who helped the League obtain the bulk of its electoral victories were the Muslim elite in areas where Muslims were in the minority. Assuming that the Muslim adult population was half the total, just 16 percent of the adult Muslim population actually voted on the Pakistan question.

Clearly, support for the creation of Pakistan was largely confined to the Muslim elite. This is confirmed by the fact that, after Partition, besides the Muslims in the divided provinces of Punjab and Bengal who had to migrate due to communal violence, a paltry one million Muslims in the rest of the country chose to migrate to the so-called Muslim 'homeland', with the overwhelming majority choosing to stay home and affirming their loyalty to the land of their birth.

Box 3: The Kashmir Issue

At the time of independence in 1947, the rulers of the princely states were given the option of joining either India or Pakistan. Though Jammu and Kashmir had a Muslim majority, its ruler opted to join India; he was backed by an indigenous Muslim movement that also favoured joining secular India rather than Muslim Pakistan. To compel the accession of this border state with Pakistan, the latter infiltrated armed personnel into the state. They were foiled by Indian forces. A ceasefire was arranged under UN auspices, after which resolutions were passed to settle the dispute. These resolutions have remained unimplemented and the Kashmir issue remains a contentious subject between the two countries.

On 5 August 2019, the Modi government obtained parliamentary approval to effect constitutional changes that have deprived Jammu and Kashmir of its 'special status'. While most sections of international opinion have viewed these changes as "internal" matters for India, Pakistani leaders have criticised these initiatives and have sought to agitate the matter at international fora. Separately, India's Supreme Court will rule on the constitutional validity of the recent changes.

In line with the tradition that Muslims in India do not view Kashmir as a "Muslim" issue, Muslim response to these changes has been generally muted.

This could be linked to the disengagement of Indian Muslims from the insurgency in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Though the issue of Kashmir goes back to Independence, the state has experienced cross-border violence since 1989, with militants from Pakistan, indoctrinated in extremist belief, and trained in armed action, subversion and even suicide bombing, perpetrating heinous terrorist acts.

Several thousand ordinary Kashmiris have been killed in this violence, alongside allegations of wanton killings and human rights abuses by Indian security forces by international organisations. But what has surprised observers is that Muslims in the rest of the country have not expressed solidarity with the Kashmir 'struggle'; it is noteworthy that in the 30 years of the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, only five Muslims from the rest of India have joined the conflict.

Box 4: UAE-India Front Against Extremism

India's 5,000-year engagement with the people of the Gulf has shaped a shared cultural ethos and has provided a high level of cultural comfort to the people linked by the waters of the Indian Ocean. In a regional environment marked by intolerance, both countries are bastions of moderation and accommodation, and have nurtured societies that are open and free, where diversity is celebrated and peaceful co-existence is extolled as a national virtue.

These values have resulted from "their cultural traditions, spiritual values and shared heritage," as was noted in the UAE-India joint statement issued in 2015.

The common threat to these values from the forces of extremism and violence has encouraged the two countries to set up a powerful front against terrorism through enhanced security cooperation covering intelligence-sharing, joint counter-terrorism operations, and adoption of best practices and technologies by the agencies of the two countries.

India and the UAE have not only condemned the misuse of religion to justify acts of violence, they have also, in the joint statement of 2015, condemned efforts by states, "to use religion to justify, support and sponsor terrorism against other countries".

The two countries went further: they also found unacceptable the attempt of regional powers "to give religious and sectarian colour to political issues and disputes, including in West and South Asia, and use terrorism to pursue their aims".

The UAE and India have the shared interest and the capacity to work together to defuse ongoing tensions in their respective regions. This joint effort will give meaning and substance to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed in 2017.²⁶

Journalist and author Ajaz Ashraf has offered the following explanation:

"Muslims in the Hindi heartland (north India) have seldom identified with their co-religionists in Kashmir, and their movement for autonomy or even independence. The possibility of Islam uniting them is offset by linguistic and cultural differences between the Muslims of north India and those in Kashmir.

These differences have been further exacerbated because Kashmiri Muslims view their political destiny differently from how Muslims in the Hindi heartland do. The latter consider India their homeland; they or their ancestors chose India over Pakistan at the time of the Partition."²⁵

Conclusion

India's 5000-year-old history is a complex mosaic of contention, accommodation and absorption of diverse peoples, beliefs and cultures venturing into the sub-continent, occupying geographical, intellectual and spiritual space and then sharing it with those who were there earlier and those who came later.

The Urdu poet, Firaq Gorakhpuri, has put it succinctly:

On the sacred land of Hind, caravans of all nations came and settled – and India continued to be shaped.

The sheer depth and variety of India's past offers several options to draw meanings and lessons that would be applicable in contemporary times.

Jawaharlal Nehru and his senior partners in the freedom movement accepted the view of a syncretic past whose values could shape a modern India capable of taking millions of its denizens, divided by faith, status and culture, into a united national endeavour towards domestic prosperity and international stature. This view of the past was merely a useful instrument for future progress since the principal interest of India's leaders was not to celebrate the past but to use the vision of broad syncretic unity to realise national achievement and success in times ahead.

This view was enshrined in the constitution in the hope that its prescriptions would over time actually become the values of India's diverse and argumentative peoples, as social beliefs and practices would eventually catch up and align themselves with these ideals.

These ideals have endured over the 70 years that India has been free. The state order has been accommodative of variety and has worked to address the concerns of the weak and vulnerable and give all communities the sense that their interests and aspirations will be promoted by the state and its laws and institutions.

This has ensured that the country's Muslims, manifesting extraordinary diversities of doctrine, practice, and educational and economic standards, have been integrated with the national firmament and its values and ideals. They have therefore not felt the need to seek the fulfilment of their interests and their collective salvation

through external agency. Their periodic dissatisfactions have been homegrown and the solutions have also been discovered at home.

Thus, India's 180 million Muslims – the second largest Muslim community globally – has rejected extremist doctrine and rejected the violent actions that almost invariably accompany such belief systems.

But alternative readings of India's past are also possible and are being invoked, not as convenient tools for future achievement, but in fact as the foundation for the resurgence of the majority Hindu community. India is today experiencing these fresh understandings of its past and new perceptions of its political future. This sets the stage for a profound debate about India's national values and ethos.

But this review of India's past through the prism of contemporary political interests is likely to be just one jolt to the national psyche, one fleeting episode, and India could again absorb this experience as well and store it in its collective memory – where numerous songs of battle, veneration, reflection and love reside.

Policy Recommendations

What lessons then do all these explorations have for policy-makers who are contending with concerns relating to the lure of extremism for their youth in their countries, especially in the Gulf and wider West Asia? While recognising that each national culture is the product of the unique history and inherited values of the society concerned, the following are some recommendations, largely based on the Indian experience.

1. The national order must be seen and actually experienced as being truly fair in viewing all citizens as equal and entitled to the full protection of the rule of law.
2. In every state order, individuals tend to adhere to groups and assert claims and interests as groups. These groups could be formal or informal and shaped variously on ethnic, religious, sectarian, tribal, clan or linguistic basis. Regardless of the nature of the group, this sub-national entity must be assured that it will never suffer any discrimination, nor will it see any other similar group enjoy any special privileges in the state order.

Box 5: Counter-Radicalisation Initiatives

Though Indian Muslims have overwhelmingly rejected the lure of extremist doctrines over the last four decades, security agencies continue to be vigilant about the possible radicalisation of youth due to grievances emerging from a perceived sense of marginalisation, humiliation or injustice, absence or denial of economic opportunities due to exclusion or discrimination, or simply the lure of a 'pure' Islamic life in a 'caliphate'.

In 2017, the government set up the Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Radicalisation Division in the Home Ministry that is working with state governments in Kerala, Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi to develop programmes to prevent the radicalisation of youth identified as vulnerable and to de-radicalise those who have drawn attention for suspicious activities (usually online) before they migrate to war zones abroad or commit crimes at home.

Since youth are likely to be radicalised through the internet, there is close monitoring of sites promoting extremist messaging and hate content, particularly those projecting "atrocities" against Muslims. In this effort, official agencies are being assisted by private Muslim organisations and even prominent individuals who have set up country-wide networks of volunteers scanning sites for objectionable content and also monitoring possible suspects. One Mumbai-based organisation is monitoring about 7,000 websites, while keeping tabs on the online conduct of those who are accessing these sites.

The counter-radicalisation programmes involve close association of family members and local religious leaders, and also those who had been radicalised earlier, who project counter-narratives to those propagated on extremist sites, highlight the syncretic character of Islam in India and espouse the nation's democratic and secular values.

In the state of Maharashtra, government officials claimed in August 2018 that 114 Muslim youth, including ten women, had successfully undertaken its de-radicalisation programme over the previous two years. During this period just five men were identified as being associated with Daesh.²⁷

3. The strength, resilience and credibility of the state order lies in its genuine commitment to the rule of law. This needs to be upheld and promoted at all times by the leadership, the security agencies and the judiciary.
4. The state order must provide opportunities for free expression of diverse opinion on matters of state policy, including political, social, economic and foreign policy, without fear of intimidation or incarceration. Such an approach would be greatly facilitated by the state order itself adopting approaches of transparency and accountability in regard to governmental action.
5. The intellectual arena of every state should provide space for the articulation of diverse ideological and political belief systems. None of them should be suppressed through the intervention of security forces, since the 'believers' will then go underground and attempt to expand support through clandestine propagation. Open and self-confident debate is the most effective instrument in challenging ideologies and political postures that the state order is uncomfortable with.
6. Naturally, it is more important for the state order to counter radicalisation than to attempt to de-radicalise captured extremists. Thus, the state order should ensure that the national space does not provide fertile ground for radical tendencies to sprout and flourish. This is best done by preaching the values of accommodation and moderation from the earliest period in school and continuing this messaging through high school and university. The content of this education could be: knowledge of other faiths and the parallels between diverse belief-systems, their shared heritage (among Abrahamic faiths) and shared values.
7. It is important to note that, while ideology may motivate certain 'true believers' in an extremist movement, particularly its top leaders, there are other equally compelling factors that could lead to radicalisation, mainly among youth. These include acts of revenge that could be responses to repression, injustice and humiliation. Hence, it is important that national narratives relating to contentious historical episodes and experiences are imbued with balanced and moderate content, even as more inflammatory assertions are firmly combatted across the educational and in the public domains through mainstream and social media.
8. In many countries, some immigrants (and even guest workers) can get radicalised due to their inability to be part of national success narratives and, hence, to increasingly view themselves as a marginalised under-class. Given the diversity of persons involved and the diverse ways they can get radicalised, there is no single policy that is likely to be effective. The best approach would be to pursue better integration policies, involving counselling, improved living environments, and improved access to education, training and employment. This will at least ensure that the marginalised sections, that constitute the bulk of the militants, are prevented from joining the radicalised sphere.

Endnotes

1. Estimate based on author's interview with a senior Intelligence Bureau officer in New Delhi, April 2018; also see Kabir Taneja, "Uncovering the influence of ISIS in India," ORF Occasional Paper (Observer Research Foundation, 12 July 2018), where the author says that around 100 cases of Indians joining ISIS are being investigated by agencies, "with liberal estimates hovering around 200-300 range".
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15. Hasan. *Legacy*. 135-36
16. *Ibid*. 139
17. *Ibid*. 140-41
18. *Ibid*. 141
19. Mushirul Hasan. 2012. "In search of integration and identity: Indian Muslims since Independence". *Indian Political Thought*. Oxford. 137
20. *Ibid*
21. Hilal Ahmed. xlv-xlv
22. Hilal Ahmed. 200-01
23. Hilal Ahmed. 194-97
24. This also meant the sidelining of 'patriotic Muslims', ie, the large numbers of Muslims who opposed Partition. (Shamsul Islam. 2018. *Muslims Against Partition of India*. New Delhi. Pharos Media)
25. Ajaz Ashraf. 17 August 2019. 'Why UP's Muslims Are Identifying With Kashmiris More than they used to'. *The Wire*, Delhi. <https://thewire.in/politics/up-muslims-kashmir-article-370> Accessed on 13 August 2019
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