**Violence in Universities**

[Wali Ejaz Nekokara](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/wali-ejaz-nekokara/)

June 1, 2022

Extreme violence has erupted in Punjab University following the Baloch, Pushtun, and Saraiki councils’ attack on the Islami Jamiat Talba’s solidarity march in favour of Yasin Malik. In response to this, the IJT members also adopted the same path, and some of them fired bullets in the air. According to information, several students were injured in the violent scuffle. The councils took the violent step to punish the IJT for its past attacks on the former. The establishment of councils at Punjab University is a result of the IJT’s brutal approach toward various ethnic groups. Increasing violent behaviour among university students is alarming. This article is a bid to explore the drivers of extremism in universities and, to offer practical solutions to this menace. A thought-provoking research paper titled, “Drivers of violent extremism in higher education institutions of Pakistan,” sheds light on the extremism in varsities comprehensively. This research paper is written by Zahid Shahab and Qamar Abbas Jafri and it studies the violence at Quaid-I-Azam University and International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI). Furthermore, this research work mentions two motives behind violence: first is ethnic violence having political motives and second is violence having religious motives. The researchers maintain that QAU possesses the seeds of ethnic violence and IIUI practices religiously motivated violence.

As a former student of QAU, I have witnessed ethnic violence multiple times. In 2017, Sindhi and Baluch student councils clashed and at least 35 students were injured. In a corollary, the QAU administration rusticated 26 students following their violent behaviour. Baloch students went on a strike and later, hunger strike to get their expelled fellows restored. An apolitical matter was made political through a malicious campaign. Baloch students presented themselves as a victim of the administration’s unjust behaviour. Balochistan Home Minister Sarfraz Bugti approached the administrative staff and emphasised the immediate solution to the issue. Political pressure compelled the administration to restore the expelled students.

Ethnic clashes have developed a cycle of events in which trouble-makers violate discipline; the university expels the trouble-makers, and the trouble-makers, through political support, again join the university.

Furthermore, in 2018, a clash took place between Punjab and Pushtun councils, and 11 students were injured. Punjab and Pushtun councils fought many times. One noticed a sense of grievance among some Pushtun and Baloch students against Punjab. The above-mentioned research paper mentions the grievance in these words,

“There still exist ethnic rivalries, mainly in the form of minority ethnic groups questioning the Punjabi’s dominance at the national level. The dominance of Punjabis in Pakistan is natural because they are around 50 per cent of the total population in the country and by virtue of that hold most seats in the upper and lower houses of the parliament and more jobs in civil and military institutions. This has led to grievances among other ethnic groups against Punjabis and the rise of ethnonationalism particularly in KPK, Sindh, and Baluchistan.”

This grievance sometimes leads to hatred towards Punjabi, which, consequently, increases the possibility of clashes between Punjabi and Pushtun councils. Ethnic clashes have developed a cycle of events in QAU: in which trouble-makers violate discipline, the university expels the trouble-makers, and the trouble-makers through political support again join the university. A few days ago, Pushtun and Saraiki Councils were on strike for the restoration of students rusticated on disciplinary charges. This time, the administration seemed adamant to break the cycle of events but again, the political intervention made students’ unjust cause legitimate. The political intervention has left two important impacts on QAU: first is that it has marred the QAU administration’s effectiveness and second, it has encouraged the trouble-makers to revise the same pattern of events next time also. The absence of political interference and punishment of trouble-makers would make the QAU administration efficient. It would further pave the way for an environment; conducive to learning. Currently, the QAU is at the mercy of trouble-makers as they can abrogate educational activities anytime.

Now, we talk about Punjab University and Islamic University. Both universities are dominated by a violent group: IJT. According to the researchers, the IJT was established in 1947 and that’s why it is the oldest group. Over time, this group got more and more strength. This group helped the Pak army in countering insurgency in East Pakistan. The IJT formed two paramilitary units: Al-Badr and Al-Shams against Bengali Guerrillas. IJT’s members have been found in terrorist activities also. The IJT in IIUI formed a sleeper cell of Al-Qaeda in Islamabad, which was implicated in the target killings of Shebaz Bhatti: a Christian minister for minorities. Furthermore, researchers maintain that IJT may have nexus with sectarian violent groups like Laskar-e-Jhangvi. In Dec 2019, IJT in IUII targeted the cultural event organised by various ethnic groups. As a result, one student was killed and several injured. IJT in IIUI has tried its best to get a foothold in QAU but ethnic councils have foiled any attempt. In 2015, an intelligence agency warned of stark consequences as IUII was promoting sectarian extremism.

If we talk about Punjab University, IJT’s clashes over ethnic events are rife. IJT members have occupied the hostels in PU and they can keep outsiders with them. IJT’s members use weapons as is seen in a recent clash. Dawn newspaper published news on September 21, 2013, that “Three suspected Al Qaeda and Taliban operatives were arrested from the Punjab University.” In August 2021, a group of PU students organised a study circle to critically analyse the Taliban’s takeover, IJT members attacked the former. The IJT members were of the view that it was an anti-Taliban study circle and they had immense respect for the Taliban. IJT has overdeveloped and has a huge influence on administrative functions. Researchers postulate that IJT has the support of university administration, donors like Saudi Arabia, academics, and some state institutions including intelligence agencies. Most importantly, ethnic and religious groups are nurseries for political and religious parties. For instance, this Ramazan, IJT invited Siraj ul Haq to the Iftaar party, which shows its political nexus. Secondly, when Pushtun students were on strike in QAU, Mohsin Dawar in National Assembly raised his voice for them. It indicates political support.

It would be pertinent to offer some practical suggestions to overcome the extremism. Firstly, courses to inculcate tolerance, pluralism and acceptance must be incorporated. Students must be aware of the Holy Prophet’s S.A.W way of life. Secondly, Universities like QAU need strong administration, which is possible through curtailing political interference. Thirdly, Punjab University’s VC is considered a supporter of IJT; he must be sacked after inquiry.

The state should carefully monitor the educational institutions. Administrative staff having a soft corner for extremists must be punished. Fourthly, Universities must work with Counter-terrorism authorities to formulate a strategy for countering extremism. Fifthly, educational institutions should be freed from political parties’ influence and politicians should not interfere in Universities’ affairs. Sixthly, altruistic values must be incorporated among the students. Seventhly, strict discipline should be ensured by the University administrations. Any student who violates discipline must be punished severely. If any student possesses weapons, he must be expelled. Eighthly, Teachers must be trained to teach tolerance and peace. Last but not least, law enforcement agencies must help university administrations break the foothold of ethnic and religious extremists on campus.

*The writer is a graduate of Quaid-I-Azam University*