

## **In the Fire of Local community Conflicts: The Role of Religious Leaders in Conflict Resolution, Examples from Pashtun Culture Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan**

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**Abstract**— Religious leaders are considered respected members of the community and they could bring an end to fighting because of their honesty and soft power resources. In this context, the present study deals with the role of religious leaders in conflict resolution. A sample size of 361 respondents was selected in the district Dir Lower Tahsil Maidan through Random Sampling Technique. Chi-square  $X^2$  statistics were used to determine the association between independent and dependent variables. Most respondents (52.1%) stated that religious leaders in Pashtun cultures symbolize peace. Similarly, more than two third of the respondents (70.9%) endorsed that religious leaders do resolve conflict by taking inputs from religious and cultural values. Most of the respondents (58.4%) opined that the participation of religious leaders is considered necessary in jirga/ culture base peacemaking. Moreover, Religious leaders among Pashtuns are considering customary leaders, having a strong influence over Pashtun costumes, and were found significant in conflict resolution respectively. The study concluded that religious leadership among Pashtun had always contributed positively to conflict resolution. The study also recommends that government should give more attention to involving religious leaders in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. This needs to integrate all sorts of leadership at the community level, which would boost their level of understanding regarding each other.

**Keywords:** Religious leaders, Cultural endorsement, Jirga, Nanwaty.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Religious harmony through the prevalence of peace among various sects in a community is not a new phenomenon. However, the latest initiatives for acquiring peace on a religious basis under conflict resolution emerged in 1990's. Its major forces revolve around identifying the source of a conflict and addressing it through religious identities while taking support from religious and linguistic motivations. It is considered essential to crush down to its minimum effects the agonies of crusades and jihads by emphasizing supporting the leadership that advocates for reconciliation through interfaith harmony (Appleby, 1999; Johnston & Sampson, 1995).

In recent years, religious peace initiatives have become more numerous, more important, much clearer, and more recognized. Diplomats, governmental and non-governmental figures, international and global organizations, media, and funding organizations pay increasing attention to the possibilities of religious peacebuilding and cooperating with religious leaders to address specific problems such as war, conflict, and violence. Also, all the religious leaders, including lay people and individual irreligious leaders of denominational structures to interdenominational and multiple religious figures, seem more open and encouraged to take up a role as peacebuilders they are busy in practices of peace. They increasingly develop various approaches for peacebuilding in collaboration with other religious and confessional organizations (Hertog, 2010).

If we observe at the international level, religion has the ability to bring cohesion between and among parties; it can produce trust in certain situations. Like in the case of Mozambique, the religious group community of Sant' Egidio played a key role in resolving an uncompromising conflict between the two feuding parties. The world is full of such examples where religious leaders did show their abilities to build trust between protagonists in the conflict.

Religious leaders can bring cohesion in the aftermath of the conflict. They can play a fundamental role in providing spiritual support to people facing pain and suffering by teaching forgiveness to reduce the emotions of revenge in their hearts. It can be concluded that religious actors, communities and their institutions can play a significant role in resolving intractable conflicts in the contemporary world. Thus, religious leaders are respected members of the community, and they can bring an end to the fighting. For example, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) brought a temporary end to the Sudanese civil war in 1972, in part through prayer at critical points in the negotiations and by invoking both Christian and Muslim texts. These and other allot of efforts from religious leaders around the world are often unrecognized and need attention from authorities, academia and other forums (Maregere, 2011).

Religious communities no doubt are the largest and best-organized civil institutions in the world today, claiming the allegiance of billions of believers and bridging the boundaries of race, class, and

nationality. They are well equipped to meet the present-day challenges of our time like resolving conflicts, caring for the sick and needy, promoting peaceful co-existence among all peoples”(paix & Karam, 2001). They bring the voice of moral authority to the diplomatic process and can monitor the shaping and implementation of policies. Similarly, this role enables religious leaders to mobilize their follower around the issue to take action. Religious leaders are at a position to teach the forgiveness and understanding necessary for countries and regions to reconcile in peace (African Council of Religious Leaders, n.d).

Thus, we can say that religion can play an important role in reducing tensions, as positive religious and traditional leaders based on theology provide an important alternative narrative to extremism and often have good links with and across communities. They can teach and ensure that religious teachings remain authentic to the true traditions rather than become the motivation for violence, radicalization, and terrorism. Religious and traditional leaders can play versatile roles in promoting peace. Such leaders can help to prevent occurrences or intensification of conflicts and to ease talks between parties to peacefully negotiate their differences without involving in violence. They have an in-depth understanding of local cultural problems and perceptions; religious and traditional leaders can help the mediation efforts of the United Nations and the international community. Recognizing the importance of religious and traditional actors working for peace, the UN Secretary-General in his recent report on mediation (A/66/811) recommended the establishment of a more in-depth partnership “recently, the main aim of the meeting in Helsinki was to connect the efforts of the United Nations with these important peace advocates” (Mediation Support Unit, 2013).

At the regional level, the Pashtun social structure in Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc., is predominantly based on clan and genealogical order (Lindholm, 1996). But there is another logical possibility for validating legitimacy is spiritual authority. They possess distinct characteristics and sacred knowledge of the Muslim holy book Quran, following the Prophet’s (PBUH) traditions. Therefore, these religious leaders always have played an important role, especially in times of internal crises and external invasions (Anonymous, n.d).

Religious leaders are always in close contact with their community, and they are receiving more trust from their followers in Pakistan. Recently Community Appraisal and Motivation Program (CAMP) conducted a study in which they found that there are top three institutions (Jirga, the local leaders, and the imam mullah of the area) through which people in tribal areas resolve their local disputes. They studied that most of the respondents were satisfied with informal justice mechanisms like Jirga, the local leaders and the imam/ mullah of the area. In their research finding, they further found that most of the participants in their study are of the opinion that the services of religious leaders are much more affordable and easily accessible. Thus, in the tribal community of FATA Pakistan, Mullah and imam are considered very important figures and an integral part of society. They are well

knowledgeable in sharia law therefore, most of the people take their disputes to these mullahs to proceed under sharia law. So, it can be concluded that religious leaders can play an important role in local dispute resolution in Pakistan and the government should take such step to mainstream them and involve them in the process of peace-making and conflict resolution (Shinwari, 2011).

Pakistan has been badly affected by religious extremism in the last few decades. The long last war on terror in the area had affected local communities and divided people across religious lines. The divided communities are seen as involved in violence against each other for different reasons related to religion (Ullah et al., 2020). This phenomenon has been recorded by different researchers differently in different regions of Pakistan.

These studies are completely different regarding regions, variable selection and conclusions. Most of the previous studies have ignored the cultural aspects of how culture supports religious leaders in playing their role in preventing violence in local communities. This study is the first that covers the cultural aspects of the religious leadership role in conflict resolution. It is quite possible that the Religious leaders can play a positive and dominant role in peacebuilding in the Pashtuns Community because the majority of the people follow them through cultural lines than pure religious lines. Hence, this study contributes to the existing literature by considering how culture supports local religious leaders to play their role in resolving local community conflicts with an example from Tahsil Maidan, District Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Peter (2008) discovered that in Asian culture, elder clerics usually have great influence over their followers and his order can never be denied by his disciples. Barfield et al. (2006) disclosed that Ulama try to replace customary law practices with standard sharia interpretations that demand their own services in dispute resolution. As compared to pre-war Afghanistan, the influence of Ulema rose sharply, particularly in the time when they came to administer the sharia in the absence of central leadership. Furthermore, Salam Institute for Peace and Justice (2005), in its recent report, highlights that *Sulha* is considered one of the important cultural and traditional conflict resolution tools that can bitterly be used by religious leaders as they are often much familiar with its process and implementation. Moreover, it can be concluded from this report that religious leaders can encourage reconciliation, interfaith dialogue, disarmament, and demilitarization and contribute to a change of attitudes. However, Ahmed et al. (2021) findings show that in Swat and Dir valleys, Religious leaders play a role in some way to the peacebuilding of the community in terms of bonding, bridging and linking.

Samim (2011) discovered that Afghani Pashtun has enough love and respect for those religious leaders who love their homeland and have enough religiosity, in one interview with Afghan tribesman, he noted that peace in our country is only gettable if America utilizes our religious leaders because

people following their advises and suggestions. People in our country love and respect those leaders who respect our traditions and dress the way people dress. Pashtun in our community love turban and turban crown, a typical symbol of any Pashtun. He further revealed through an interview with the respondents that if someone wants Pashtun to cooperate in the current peace process, they should approach their leaders, such as religious and tribal leaders these are influential people who control people's mentality in our community. Pashtun respect for religion and religious leaders can be analyzed from the fact that they rank religion as first, independence as second and their culture as third.

Nojumi et al. (2004) found that “During the period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, Jirga and Shura are dominated by mullah authorities. A network of religious leaders was developed by the Taliban for the imposition of a particular interpretation of Sunni Islam in the whole country. Some contradictory customary laws with Islamic jurisprudence, such as Pashtunwali, were also tried to eliminate. Barfield (2003) stated that it could be observed among the Pashtun community in Afghanistan that there is a close relation between sharia and customary laws due to its nature of closeness and the melding of the two are hardly separable. Moreover, Sial (2013) believes that Religious leaders in Pakistan, particularly Muslim scholars, need to counter violent extremism and radicalization to promote peace in society. He further recommended that religious leaders become familiar and understand the state institutions and society. However, the lack of trust and cooperation are the most significant challenges faced by Religious leaders from the state-apparatus (Ahmed et al., 2021).

Under the given circumstances in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan., according to Taieb (2008), Religious leaders perform as arbitrators or mediators. He presents that the reason for this is that a religious leader mediates consensus between the conflicting parties. Moreover, he also arbitrates those disputes when the parties to a dispute submit their case to be decided under Islamic law. Because disputing parties are part and parcel of the mediation process, which also asserts the autonomy and equality of disputing members, and mediation is favored over arbitration. Assefa and as a Paradigm (1993), Curle (1990), and (Hanh, 1987) exploring the role of religion in peacebuilding is a crucial initiative in the study of culture and peacebuilding.

The cultural identities of many people involved in conflict dynamics mainly depend on religious norms and values. Scholars and practitioners believe that escalation and de-escalation of conflicts can be influenced by non-religious cultural attributes. Similarly, cultural-religious attributes play a critical role in conflict resolution. Religious values have the same power as cultural values; it can push people to conflict or to reconcile. The same is the case of religious rituals, like other cultural rituals, that can bring animosity to cooperation. Religion can be a powerful tool in bringing spiritual, social and moral resources to the process of peacebuilding. The spiritual dimension in religious peacebuilding can create a sense of engagement and a commitment both to peace and to transforming a relationship of a missing

dimension from the mechanical and instrumental conflict resolution models (for the role of spirituality in conflict transformation).

### III. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study is an attempt to explore the role of religious leaders in conflict resolution. Tehsil Maidan constitutes the universe for this study. It consists of five union councils, out of which two union councils, namely Zaimdara and Beshgram were purposively selected to collect the data. The main reason for selecting these union councils is the availability of a big chunk of religious leaders who has a strong hold over many dynamics of social conflict. Also, this region has recently seen a high wave of religious extremism and conflict due to the war on terror. The population is composed of those household heads who have frequent interaction with religious leaders in different occasions, such as in mosques, jirga, and funeral death ceremonies and who are also the main stakeholder of social conflict at the community level.

According to the Population Census Organization Statistic Division Government of Pakistan Islamabad (1998) total population of the union council Zaimdara is 23774, where is average household is 9.8, while the total population of union council Beshgram is 26204 and its average household size is 8.4. After calculation, a sample size of 361 respondents out of total of 5544 household heads with the above-mentioned characteristics was randomly taken for data collection through the criteria set out by Sekaran and Bougie (2003) from a table population of 6000.

The sample size is distributed through a proportional allocation basis under the formula.

$$n_i = \frac{n}{N} \times N_i$$

Where,

$n$  =Required Sample Size

$N$  =Population Size

$N_i$  =Size of  $i^{th}$  Strata

$n_i$  =Sample Size to be Taken from  $i^{th}$  Strata

**Table 1. Showing Population and Sample Size Distribution for Each Stratum**

Union Council	Average Household Size	Formula	Sample for Strata
Zaimdara	$2425 = N_1$	$\frac{n}{N} * N_1$	158
Beshgram	$3119 = N_2$	$\frac{n}{N} * N_2$	203
Total	5544		361

Table 1 indicates that to select a sample size of 361 households from the total population, 158 households have been taken from Zaimdara union council and 203 households have been taken from Beshgram union council, respectively. This proportional allocation procedure was adopted from Chaudhry (1996).

A comprehensive interview schedule while considering the objectives and conceptual framework is designed (see figure 1). Furthermore, to obtain information orderly, the Likert scale was applied instead of going for another form of the questionnaire. Anonymous policy regarding the questionnaire was considered to ensure the confidentiality of the participants included as respondents in the study.

Data entry and validation have been done through the statistical package for social science (SPSS) 20<sup>th</sup> version. The data has been operationalized through Chi-Square statistical procedure i.e., to determine the association between independent and dependent variables individually. The formula for this application is as below.

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^c \frac{(o_{ij} - e_{ij})^2}{e_{ij}}$$

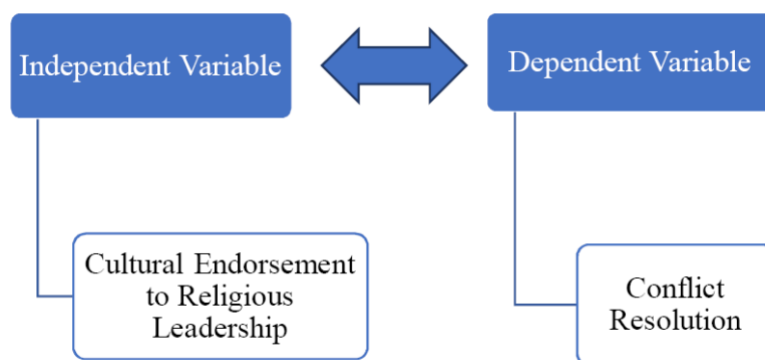
Where

$\chi^2$  = Chi-Square for two categorical variables

$\sum_{i=1}^r$  = Total of  $i^{th}$  row

$\sum_{j=1}^c$  = Total of  $i^{th}$  column

$O_{ij}$  and  $e_{ij}$  = Represent the observation and expected value shown by Chaudhry (1996).



Source: Researcher's work

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

#### **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

##### ***Univariate analysis***

This portion is composed of an independent variable, namely cultural endorsement of religious leaders and a dependent variable, namely conflict resolution. The variables are narrated below.

##### ***Cultural Endorsement to Religious Leadership***

Culture is considered an important aspect of human life that influence every aspect of life. Leadership practices are influenced by culture in one way or another. Cultural support to religious leaders is much more important than any other in conflict resolution. The data presented in Table 2 disclosed cultural endorsement of religious leadership in conflict resolution. More than two thirds 244 (67.6%) of the respondents revealed that Pashtun and Islamic norms and values were similar up to some extent, 's why it gave credibility to religious leaders, while on the other hand, only 83 (23.0%) of the respondents negated this statement. Barfield (2003) found that it can be observed among the Pashtun community in Afghanistan that there is a close relationship between sharia and customary laws due to its nature of closeness and melding, and both are hardly separable.

A sizable proportion of the respondents, i.e., 188 (52.1%) said that religious leaders in Pashtun culture are the symbols of peace, while 109 (30.2%) didn't agree to this statement. More than half, 196 (54.3%) of the respondents endorsed the statement that Pashtun culture gives more respect and honor to religious leaders as compared to other leaders; contrary, 125 (34.6%), on the other hand, denied the statement. The finding of Rahmani (2006) was in close matching with these findings. She found that Mullah is laid on the power ladder due to the judiciary and religious role that he plays on a daily basis. It is often impossible for anyone, including powerful local elites such as landlords or executives, to face the mullah in public places. Any conflict resolution strategy depends upon the matter of how much it is integrated into the existing cultural norms and values as 216 (59.8%) of respondents endorsed that people mostly follow and accept those religious leaders who follow cultural as well as religious values but on other hands,96 (26.6%) of the respondents were found disagree to it. Samim (2011) discovered the alike findings in his interviews with the respondents, which revealed that Pashtun people love and respect those leaders who respect our traditions and dresses. Pashtun in our community love turbans being a symbol of cultural norms. He found that if someone wants Pashtun to cooperate in the current peace process, they should approach their leaders, such as religious and tribal leaders. These are influential people who control people's mentality in the Pashtun community. Religion is found very powerful in every era, and it has tremendous influence over individual mentality. More than two-thirds244 (67.6%) of the respondents stated that religious identity is more central (meaningful) than cultural identity, while 79 (21.9%) of respondents negated this statement. Assefa and as a Paradigm



(1993), Curle (1990), and Hanh (1987) explored the same result in their findings that the role of religion in peacebuilding is a crucial initiative in the study of culture and peacebuilding.

The cultural identities of many people involved in conflict dynamics mainly depend on religious norms and values. The majority of 201 (55.7%) of the respondents stated that religious leaders among Pashtun are considered customary leaders, too, while 113 (31.3%) of the respondents negated this statement. Religio-cultural approaches in conflict resolution are always fruitful, as the majority, 256 (70.9%) of the respondents, stated that religious leaders do resolve conflict by taking inputs from religious and cultural values as well. In comparison, 60 (16.6%) of the respondents opposed it. As Pashtun people have more respect for religious leaders, the majority 229 (63.4%) of the respondents, disclosed that Pashtun culture supports the role and efforts of religious leaders in peacebuilding.

On the other hand, 100 (27.7%) of the respondents didn't support this statement. Jirga is an important historical way of conflict resolution among Pashtun, as a majority of 211 (58.4%) of the respondents endorsed that participation of religious leaders are considered necessary in jirga/ a culture base of peacemaking. In comparison, only 114 (31.6%) of the respondents negated this statement. Nojumi et al. (2004) found the same results in their study that during the period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, Jirga and shura were dominated by mullah authorities. Harmful traditions have a historical root in Pashtun culture as a majority 244 (67.6%) of the respondents, stated that religious leaders cannot challenge the harmful traditions of Pashtun culture, while some 73 (20.2%) respondents stated that religious leaders still have the capabilities that can challenge Pashtun culture harmful traditions. Brick (2008) in his study of Afghani society, probed that religious leaders in the community have the power to control over unislamic practices such as movies and music. Almost two-thirds 241 (66.8%) of the respondents, stated that religious leaders have a strong influence on Pashtun traditions such as marriage and death ceremonies, while only 94 (26.0%) of the respondent were found to disagree with this statement. The majority 208 (57.6%) of the respondents, stated that religious leaders are also supported by traditional leaders, while a sizable proportion 111 (30.7%) of the respondents, negated this statement. Nanawaty is a Pashtun way of reconciliation by going to the victim home with a team of elders and women to forgive the accused. Almost two thirds 258 (71.5%) of the respondent stated that no one rejects a Nanawaty in a normal case when a religious leader is also a member of Nanawaty team. In contrast, some 73 (20.2%) respondents negated this statement.

**Table 2. Cultural Endorsement to Religious Leadership**

S.No	Attribute	YES	NO	Don't know	Total
1	Similarity between Islamic and Pashtun cultural norms and values give credibility to religious leaders	244 (67.6%)	83 (23.0%)	34 (9.4%)	361 (100%)
2	Religious leaders in Pashtun cultures are the symbols of peace.	188 (52.1%)	109 (30.2%)	64 (17.7%)	361 (100%)
3	Pashtun culture gives more respect and honor to religious leaders as compared to other leaders.	196 (54.3%)	125 (34.6%)	40 (11.1%)	361 (100%)
4	People mostly follow and accept those religious leaders who follow cultural as well as religious values.	216 (59.8%)	96 (26.6%)	49 (13.6%)	361 (100%)
5	Religious identity is more central (meaningful) than cultural identity.	244 (67.6%)	79 (21.9%)	38 (10.5%)	361 (100%)
6	Religious leaders among Pashtun are considering customary leaders too.	201 (55.7%)	113 (31.3%)	47 (13.0%)	361 (100%)
7	Religious leaders do resolve conflict by taking inputs from religious and cultural values as well	256 (70.9%)	60 (16.6%)	45 (12.5%)	361 (100%)
8	Pashtun culture supports the role and efforts of religious leaders in peace building.	229 (63.4%)	100 (27.7%)	32 (8.9%)	361 (100%)
9	The participation of religious leaders are consider necessary in jirga/ culture base peacemaking	211 (58.4%)	114 (31.6%)	36 (10.0%)	361 (100%)
10	Religious leaders cannot challenge the harmful tradition of Pashtun culture	244 (67.6%)	73 (20.2%)	44 (12.2%)	361 (100%)
11	Religious leaders have a strong influence over Pashtun costumes such as marriage and death ceremonies.	241 (66.8%)	94 (26.0%)	26 (7.2%)	361 (100%)
12	Religious leaders are supported by traditional leaders too	208 (57.6%)	111 (30.7%)	42 (11.6%)	361 (100%)
13	No one reject a Nanawaty in a normal case when a religious leader is also a member of Nanawaty team	258 (71.5%)	73 (20.2%)	30 (8.3%)	361 (100%)

**Source:** Field Survey-2021

### ***Bivariate Analysis***

The Chi-square test was applied to measure the association between the dependent 'conflict resolution' and independent variable 'cultural endorsement to religious leadership' in Pashtun Community.

### ***Cultural Endorsement to Religious Leadership***

Table 3 depicts the association between conflict resolution as the dependent variable and cultural endorsement of religious leadership as an independent variable. The results found a significant association of conflict resolution with the statements that most Pashtun cultural norms and values are similar to Islamic norms and values, which intern gives credibility to religious leaders ( $P=.019$ ). These were in consonant to Barfield (2003) that it can be observed among the Pashtun community in Afghanistan that there is a close relation between sharia and customary laws due to its nature of closeness and melding the two are hardly separable. Religious leaders in Pashtun cultures are the symbols of peace ( $P=.014$ ), as disclosed as having a significant association with conflict resolution. Religious identity is more central (meaningful) than cultural identity ( $P=.035$ ), as indicated by a significant association similarly. Religious leaders among Pashtun are considering customary leaders too ( $P=.004$ ) and had a significant association with conflict resolution. The participation of religious leaders is considered necessary in jirga/ culture base peacemaking ( $P=.013$ ) had also a significant association with conflict resolution. Whereas Nojumi et al. (2004) reported that "During the period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, Jirga and shura were dominated by mullah authorities. A network of religious leaders was developed by the Taliban for the imposition of a particular interpretation of Sunni Islam in the whole country. Religious leaders cannot challenge the harmful tradition of Pashtun culture ( $P=.015$ ) had a significant association with conflict resolution. On the other hand, Brick (2008), in his study of Afghani society, pointed out that religious leaders in the community had the power to control un-Islamic practices such as movies and music. Moreover, religious leaders have a strong influence over Pashtun costumes, such as marriage and death ceremonies ( $P=.001$ ) as a significant association was discovered with conflict resolution.

While in contrast, conflict resolution had a non-significant association with Pashtun culture gives more respect and honor to religious leaders as compared to other leaders ( $P=.821$ ). People mostly follow and accept those religious leaders who follow cultural as well as religious values ( $P=.256$ ), which had a non-significant association with conflict resolution. Religious leaders do resolve conflict by taking inputs from religious and cultural values as well ( $P=.760$ ) was also disclosed with non-significant association with conflict resolution. Pashtun culture supports the role and efforts of religious leaders in peacebuilding ( $P=.134$ ) had also a non-significant association with conflict resolution. While contrary to these results, Dorransoro (2005) found in Afghani society that religious clerics and leaders who are

called mullahs perform not only religious services but are also involved in resolving disputes particularly related to family or other important personal issues. Religious leaders are supported by traditional leaders (P=.263) had a non-significant association with conflict resolution. No one rejects a Nanawaty in a normal case when a religious leader is also a member of Nanawaty team (P=.276) was also found non-significant with conflict resolution.

**Table 3 Cultural Endorsement to Religious Leadership**

S. No	Statement		Conflict Resolution			Chi Square P Value
			Yes	No	Don't Know	
1	Most of the Pashtun cultural norms and values are similar to Islamic norms and values which intern give credibility to religious leaders	Yes	172(47.6%)	57(15.8%)	15(4.2%)	X <sup>2</sup> =11.773 P=.019
		No	70(19.4%)	12(3.3%)	1(0.3%)	
		Don't Know	19(5.3%)	12(3.3%)	3(0.8%)	
2	Religious leaders in Pashtun cultures are the symbols of peace.	Yes	148 (41.0%)	34(9.4%)	6(1.7%)	X <sup>2</sup> =12.487 P=.014
		No	66 (18.3%)	33(9.1%)	10(2.8%)	
		Don't Know	47(13.0%)	14(3.9%)	3(0.8%)	
3	Pashtun culture gives more respect and honor to religious leaders as compared to other leaders.	Yes	144(39.9%)	40(11.1%)	12(3.3%)	X <sup>2</sup> =1.53 P=.821
		No	89(24.7%)	31(8.6%)	5(1.4%)	
		Don't Know	28(7.8%)	10(2.8%)	2(0.56)	
4	People mostly follow and accept those religious leaders who follow cultural as well as religious values.	Yes	156(43.2%)	47(13.0%)	13(3.6%)	X <sup>2</sup> =5.324 P=.256
		No	75(20.8%)	18(5.00%)	3(0.8%)	
		Don't Know	30(8.3%)	16(4.4%)	3(0.8%)	
5	Religious identity is more central (meaningful) than cultural identity.	Yes	166(46.0%)	64(17.7%)	14(3.9%)	X <sup>2</sup> =10.312 P=.035
		No	68(18.8%)	9(2.5%)	2(0.6%)	
		Don't Know	27(7.5%)	8(2.2%)	3(0.8%)	
6	Religious leaders among Pashtun are considering customary leaders too.	Yes	140(38.8%)	46(12.7%)	15(4.2%)	X <sup>2</sup> =15.658 P=.004
		No	94(26.0%)	18(5.0%)	1(0.3%)	
		Don't Know	27(7.5%)	17(4.7%)	3(0.8%)	
7	Religious leaders do resolve conflict by taking inputs from religious and cultural values as well	Yes	183(50.7%)	58(16.1%)	15(4.2%)	X <sup>2</sup> =1.867 P=.760
		No	47(13.0%)	11(3.0%)	2(0.6%)	
		Don't Know	31(8.6%)	12(3.3%)	2(0.6%)	
8	Pashtun culture supports the role and efforts of religious leaders in peace building.	Yes	170(47.1%)	58(14.1%)	8(2.2%)	X <sup>2</sup> =7.027 P=.134
		No	66(18.3%)	24(6.6%)	10(2.8%)	
		Don't Know	25(6.9%)	6(1.7%)	1(0.3%)	
9	The participation of religious leaders are consider necessary in Jirga/ culture base peacemaking	Yes	149(41.3%)	47(13.0%)	15(4.2%)	X <sup>2</sup> =12.591P=.013
		No	92(25.5%)	21(5.8%)	1(0.3%)	
		Don't Know	20(5.5%)	13(3.6%)	3(0.8%)	
10	Religious leaders cannot challenge the harmful tradition of Pashtun culture	Yes	166(46.0%)	64(17.7%)	14(3.9%)	X <sup>2</sup> =12.380 P=.015
		No	64(17.7%)	8(2.2%)	1(0.3%)	
		Don't Know	31(8.6%)	9(2.5%)	4(1.1%)	
11	Religious leaders have a strong influence over Pashtun costumes such as marriage and death ceremonies.	Yes	185(51.2%)	44(12.2%)	12(3.3%)	X <sup>2</sup> =18.083 P=.001
		No	66(18.3%)	24(6.6%)	4(1.1%)	
		Don't Know	10(2.8%)	13(3.6%)	3(0.8%)	
12	Religious leaders are supported by traditional leaders too	Yes	147(40.7%)	47(13.0%)	14(3.9%)	X <sup>2</sup> =5.242 P=.263
		No	87(24.1%)	21(5.8%)	3(0.8%)	
		Don't Know	27(7.5%)	13(3.6%)	2(0.6%)	
13	No one reject a Nanawaty in a normal case when a religious leader is also a member of Nanawaty team	Yes	183(50.7%)	60(16.6%)	15(0.8%)	X <sup>2</sup> =5.110 P=.276
		No	59(16.3%)	11(3.0%)	3(15.8%)	
		Don't Know	19(5.3%)	10(2.8%)	1(0.3%)	

Source: Field Survey-2021

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the conflict resolution mechanism was a big issue that deteriorated the prevalent social process. Religious leaders were found to have a positive role in addressing the issue. It was further explored that religious leaders in Pashtun cultures symbolize peace. Moreover, religious leaders have a strong influence over Pashtun costumes, such as marriage and death ceremonies. This credibility had a strong association with explaining the prevalent cultural values as in accordance with the religious values as religious values were deemed with meaningful manifestation as per customary traditions. Religious leadership can be used as real mediators through Jirga, Nanawaty and other Pashtun customary platforms to reconcile among the agonistic parties. Local religious leaders' participation is deemed necessary by locals in such reconciliation platforms. The study also highlights that religious leaders do resolve conflict by taking inputs from religious and cultural values as well. Hence, keeping in view the findings, the study recommended that first, the government needs to give proper recognition to religious leaders while including them in reconciliation for dispute settlement on a local level. Second, the government needs to properly educate religious leaders as per Pashtuns' prevalent legislative, administrative, and constitutional norms. It would enable them to reach any conclusive stage with no contradiction to the religious injunctions. Third, religious leaders play a bridge role between the masses and the state. The government, therefore, needs to facilitate and honor the decisions of these leaders over an issue as per consensus to state machinery, and fourth, social cohesion and integration are essential for the maintainability of the social process. To ensure its accomplishment, all leadership strata.e., political, social, customary, and religious leaders, need to be organized through a common platform for understanding each other characteristics within the preview of socio-cultural and religious milieu.

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