

The Emergence of Barelwi Extremism
“Protecting” the Honour of the Prophet while Betraying His Tradition.

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Dedication

To Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ
(Peace and Blessings be upon Him and His Progeny)

Whose honour is too high to be in need of any person claiming to be a
so-called guardian and protector of His honour.

ALLAH alone is sufficient to protect His honour.

The Emergence of Sufi Fundamentalism

Radicalisation of Barelwis and its effects in Pakistan

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Introduction

Pakistan has been badly marred by extremism and terrorism since 1980's especially after Pakistan's alliance with the US in countering Communism in Afghanistan. Pakistan's alliance with the US in the War on Terror has further shaken the social fabric of its society and the resulting increase of extremism and terrorism is affecting Pakistan adversely. Attacks by Taliban have claimed over 60,000 lives.¹ Most militants and extremists including the *Taliban*, *Tehreek Taliban Pakistan* and *Lashkar e Jhangawi* associate themselves with the Deobandi faction of Sunni Islam. However, over the last few years, a new trend has emerged in Pakistani society, beginning with the murder of Salman Taseer, Governor of Punjab, who was murdered in Islamabad in January 2011, by one of his own bodyguards, Malik Mumtaz Qadri. In his confession statement, Qadri admitted that he committed the murder to avenge the Governor's public criticism of Pakistan's blasphemy law. Qadri belonged to the Barelwi faction and the case of Salman Taseer and the scale of Barelwis support for Qadri have rattled many popular conceptions about Barelwis moderation.

“While many factions have lauded the slaying [of Governor Taseer], the peace-promoting Barelwi sect has spearheaded mass rallies to demand the release of the assassin, a policeman. Because most Pakistanis are Barelwis, their stance is challenging the belief long held among liberals here-and hoped for by nervous U.S. officials-that the Muslim majority in this nuclear-armed nation is more moderate than militant”²

Barelwis are estimated to constitute between 50%-60% of the Muslim population in Pakistan in contrast with 20%-25% Deobandis, 15% percent Shia s and 5% Salafis/Wahhabis.³ The Deobandis are responsible for more than 90 % of militancy, 100 % of suicide bombings and other indiscriminate massacres in the country. Barelwis, however, are the least violent among the Muslim community, responsible for less than 1 % of militancy.⁴

A new narrative and ideology is spreading among Barelwi Muslims which has led to the glorification of those who kill in the name of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) in order to “protect his honour and dignity”. This essay examines the historical background of the Barelwi movement and the recently popular narrative “Gustakh e Rasool ki ek hi Saza, Sir tan se Juda” and will explore the countering of this form of extremist ideology, promoting a counter narrative with the tradition of Islam.

¹ Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003-2017 Statistics.
<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/casualties.htm>

² Karin Brulliard, “In Pakistan, even anti-violence Islamic sect lauds assassination of liberal governor,” *Washington Post*, January 29, 2011

³ Global Security. n.d. Barelvi Islam. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-barelvi.htm>

⁴Hussain, S.E. 2010. *Terrorism in Pakistan: Incident patterns, terrorists' characteristics, and the impact of terrorist arrests on terrorism*. PhD Thesis. University of Pennsylvania.

Background of Barelwi-Deobandi polemic

Sunni Muslims in South Asia are divided mostly among Barelwis and Deobandis. The Barelwis movement represents a pluralistic Sufi tradition of Sunni Islam in Pakistan and is characterized by *darbaars* (shrines) of Saints that have been historically welcoming towards not only Muslim of other sects but also towards non-Muslims. In contrast, the Deobandi movement is mostly aligned with Wahhabism and advances harsh, takfiri and jihadist interpretation of Islam.⁵ Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband, which was established in 1866, discreetly promoted the Wahhabi puritanical ideology.⁶ The Barelwi movement in the subcontinent has been resisting the ultra-orthodox, anti-Sufi, ideology of the Deobandis and Wahhabis.⁷ The Barelwi movement defended popular Sufism and traditional Islamic teachings in the subcontinent, and grew in response to the increasing influence of Deobandi and Wahabi ideologies.

The Barelwi movement was founded by Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan (1856-1921) as a safeguard against Wahhabi-inspired Deobandi literalism in South Asia. The name Barelwi traces its roots to the Indian town of Bareilly, the birthplace of Khan. Khan travelled for Hajj in 1906 and asked the *Ulema* (scholars) of Makkah and Madinah to endorse the compilation of his fatwas and refutations of the teachings of Deobandis, *Hussam al-Haramain*.⁸ A total of 32 scholars endorsed *Hussam al-Haramain* and upon his return to Bareilly this collection was circulated throughout South Asia. Most of the fatwas are concerned with what constitutes the proper reverence of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him). By these standards, Khan accused the Deobandis of not bestowing sufficient respect and reverence upon the Prophet, and thus found them guilty of heresy. The Deobandi clerics responded by developing their own refutations of Khan's teachings and also labelled the Barelwi movement also as heretic.

While both these Islamic movements adhere to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, Barelwis and Deobandis differ in doctrines and practices. Numerous Fatwa's by Deobandi clerics state that Barelwis practices are polytheistic and heretical. As a result of such Fatwas, Sufi shrines in Pakistan have been attacked, especially in the last decades. In such attacks hundreds of innocent people have been killed.⁹ Contemporary Deobandi and Wahhabi fundamentalists criticise popular Sufism as in their view, it does not reflect the "pure" teachings of Islam.¹⁰ Sufi practices such as the commemoration of the Mawlid (Birth of Prophet Muhammad), Urs (death anniversary of a Sufi Saint) and the 10th of Muharram (martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's grandson Imam Hussain) are all considered to be evil innovations by Deobandis and Wahhabis. They believe that the Barelwis do not represent mainstream Islam and, therefore, do not constitute a credible counterpoint to the Deobandi and Wahabi version of "pure" Islam.¹¹ Deobandi and Wahhabi religious activities actively aim at purging Islam of the impure traditional practices of Barelwis and Sunni Sufis.

⁵ Lewis, M.W. *Deobandi Islam vs Barelvi Islam in South Asia*. *Geo Current*. October 7,2010

⁶ See Manzur Naumani's book "*Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab aur Hindustak kay Ulama e Haq*", i.e., Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and the tightly guided clerics of India".

⁷ Moj, M. *The Deoband Madrassah Movement, Countercultural Trends and Tendencies*. Anthem Press, 2015

⁸ Usha Sanjal, p.108.

⁹ "Pakistan shrine attack-No Place for 'soft' Islam in a hard country". *DW* <http://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-shrine-attack-no-place-for-soft-islam-in-a-hard-country/a-37595893>

¹⁰ Buchen, S. *Sufism under attack in Pakistan*. The New York Times. Times video, June6. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/asia/1248069532117/sufism-under-attack-in-pakistan.html>

¹¹ Fareed, F. *Sufi group rejects Deoband fatwa against celebrating Prophet's birthday*. Two circles, 10th November. http://twocircles.net/2011nov10/sufi_group_rejects_deoband_fatwa_against_celebrating_prophets_birthday.html

Historically, Barelwis and other traditional Sufis have shown an inclusive and non-violent approach to other sects and faiths, which is in stark contrast to the takfiri, jihadist and violent character of the Deobandi and Wahhabi movements. Deobandism and Wahabism share common roots and admiration for medieval polemicist, and takfiri jihadist clerics such as Ibn Taimiya (1263-1328) and Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792).

Attacks on Barelwis in Pakistan

During General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship, the Deobandi and Salafi/Wahhabi ideologies received state patronage, in addition to immense financial support from Saudi Arabia.¹² The relation of militancy among Deobandis is also reflected by an intense theological debate in 1979, known as "Munazira e Jhang", held in Jhang between a Barelwi scholar, Muhammad Ashraf Sialvi, and Deobandi scholar, Haq Nawaz Jhangwi that lasted for 8 hours.¹³ The Deobandi scholar, Haq Nawaz Jhangwi, later formed the infamous militant organisation called *Sipah-e-Sahabah*, which is behind the killing of Shias, Barelwis and minorities throughout Pakistan.¹⁴

In recent decades, Deobandi militant organizations have serially attacked not only Shias but also Sunni Sufis, Barelwis, Christians and Ahmadis. According to an estimate, more than 600 Barelwi activists and leader have been killed, while the total number of Barelwis killed by Deobandi militants are in the tens of thousands.¹⁵

Syed writes in *Barelvi Militancy in Pakistan*:

"Deobandi militants have seized Barelwi mosques, attacked their shrines and targeted their scholars. There have been numerous attacks on Sunni Barelwi and Shia processions honouring the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (Milad un-Nabi), and the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (grandson of the Prophet), in different parts of Pakistan.¹⁶ In 2010 there were additional assaults on prominent Barelwi and Sufi shrines, such as the Data Ganj Bakhsh in Lahore (50 killed)¹⁷ and Abdullah Shah Ghazi in Karachi (at least eight killed). In 2011 there was an attack on the Sakhi Sarwar shrine in Dera Ghazi Khan (more than 50 killed). In February 2013, there was another on the Ghulam Shah Ghazi shrine in Shikarpur (four killed)."¹⁸

¹² DW, 24th August 2012. The 'Wahabi Republic' of Pakistan. <http://www.dw.com/en/the-wahabi-republic-of-pakistan/a-16191055>

¹³ *Munazira-e-Jhang*, Ahlus Sunnah Publications, Jehlum.

¹⁴ Sipah e Sahabah Pakistan <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/147#note5>

¹⁵ Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003-2017 Statistics.

¹⁶ The Express Tribune, 15th January 2013. Police foil terror plot targeting Eid Milad procession in DI Khan. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/498984/police-foil-terror-plot-targeting-eid-milad-procession-in-di-khan/>

¹⁷ CNN, 2nd July 2010. Explosions at famous shrine in Pakistan kill dozens.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcd/07/02/pakistan.explosions/index.html>

¹⁸ The Express Tribune, 4th March 2013. Shikarpur blast: the pir of the shrine succumbs to injuries.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/515690/shikarpur-blast-gaddi-nasheen-of-the-shrine-succumbs-to-injuries/>

Barelwis often highlight the Nishtar Park massacre of 2006 as an example of a Deobandi effort to eliminate Barelwis. The top leadership of Sunni Tehreek was all killed in that attack by a suicide attacker.¹⁹ The perpetrator belonged to the terrorist Deobandi militant group Sipah Sahabah Pakistan.

In 2009 leading Barelwi scholar and a prominent voice against Taliban, Mufti Sarfaraz Naeemi, was killed by a suicide bomber belonging to the Tehreek Taliban Pakistan.²⁰ Many other Sunni leaders including Pir Samiullah Shah, Mahmood Shah, Saleem Qadri, Abbas Qadri and others have been killed by Deobandi militants. These militants have also killed clerics from the Deobandi movement due to social, ideological and political disputes such as Maulana Hasan Jan and Dr. Muhammad Farooq. These attacks are sometimes misunderstood as attacks that represent a sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Pakistan, while they are, more accurately, to be described as largely one-sided Deobandi attacks on Barelwi, Sunni Sufi and other religious communities.

Deobandi-Barelwi struggle for religious and political influence

Over the last three decades the Deobandis and Wahhabis have been religious and politically strengthened while Barelwis have been increasingly side lined. Although the Barelwis are still considered to be the largest Islamic group in Pakistan, the Deobandi madrassahs alone have increased by 294 % between 1988 and 2002. In 1988 there were 1779 Deobandi Madrasahs and in 2002 the numbers were 7000.²¹

A number of factors have contributed to the decline of Barelwi influence and the incline of Deobandi and Salafi puritanical influences over the past few decades. Movements and madrassahs connected with the Deobandi and Salafi schools supported the Islamization policies of Zia-ul-Haq, received financial support from Saudi Arabia and participated actively in the anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad.^{22 23} In Karachi and other parts of Pakistan, traditional Barelwi mosques were taken over by Deobandi Imams, often associated with various Deobandi organisations, i.e. Sipah Sahabah, JUI and the Tableeghi Jamaat.²⁴ In this context the *Sunni Tehreek* emerged as the Sunni Barelwi resistance to Deobandi militancy. The focus of *Sunni Tehreek* had been limited to countering Deobandi militants and their leaders. The *Sunni Tehreek* did not receive support from the government and was effectively neutralised after the massacre of its main leaders in the 2006 Nishtar Park bombing in Karachi.

After the September 11th attacks in New York, President Musharraf started to institutionalize Barelwis in Pakistan to counter the new wave of religious extremism by establishing the ‘National Council for Promotion of Sufi Council.’ It was argued that Sufism was based on tolerance and harmony which suited Pakistan’s diversity. The US also took great interest and supported the *Sunni Ittehad Council* —a Barelwi religious party which was primarily

¹⁹ “Ditching the tag of mysticism, Barelvi militancy rears head in form of Sunni Tehreek” Geo <https://www.geo.tv/latest/103302-Ditching-the-tag-of-mysticism-Barelvi-militancy-rears-head-in-form-of-Sunni-Tehreek>

²⁰ Muhammad Faisal Ali, “Suicide bomber kills anti-Taliban cleric Allama Naeemi” Daws, 13th June 2009 <https://www.dawn.com/news/470972>

²¹ Dr. Rahman Tariq, a noted Pakistani scholar of education.

²² The Deobandi school remains the dominant sect in the western region of Pakistan, including tribal areas.

²³ “The military jihad challenge”, *International Crisis Group*, Asia Report No 164, March 13, 2009

²⁴ Jamal, A. “Sufi Militants struggle with Deobandi Jihadists in Pakistan”. *The Jamestown Foundation*. <https://jamestown.org/program/sufi-militants-struggle-with-deobandi-jihadists-in-pakistan/>

established to incite Barelwis to counter the influence of the Taliban and extremist ideologies.²⁵

After President Musharraf's regime, the Pakistan People's Party continued to support Barelwis in an effort to rein in militancy and to acquire religious support for their counter-terrorism policies. The PPP message officially called to spread the message of the Sufis, a policy meant to reduce the influence of puritan ideologies. In 2009, the PPP government set up an organisation called the "Sufi Advisory Council".

Murder of Salman Taseer; a turning point in the Barelwi ideology

On 4 January 2011, the Governor of Punjab province, Salman Taseer was shot 26 times and killed by one of his own security guards, Malik Mumtaz Qadri. Upon arrest, Qadri stated that he had killed the Governor for his critical statement against the blasphemy law of Pakistan.²⁶ Governor Taseer had in the previous weeks advocated for freedom of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman convicted to death for allegedly committing blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him), to be freed.²⁷ Taseer personally visited her and forwarded her clemency appeal to the President. During a press conference Taseer referred to the blasphemy law as a black law. He further stated in an interview "The blasphemy law is not a God-made law. It's a man-made law. It was made by General Zia-ul-Haq and the portion about giving a death sentence was put in by Nawaz Sharif. So, it's a law which gives an excuse to extremists and reactionaries to target weak people and minorities."²⁸

The remarks of Governor Taseer were interpreted as if he was a proponent of the the blasphemy of the Prophet. Religious groups around the country staged mass protests against the government, expressing support for the blasphemy law and to condemn Taseer. Some scholars even claimed that Taseer himself was now himself guilty of apostasy because he referred to the blasphemy law as a black law.²⁹ Barelwi cleric Mufti Hanif Qureshi, during a provocative public talk, called to take revenge against those who want to change the blasphemy law. He said "No law can capture us. We are Sunnis. We know how to cut with knives and also how to shoot with guns. One who blasphemes against Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) has no right to live." He then addressed the government and said, "Take out the dog (referring to Governor Taseer), and we will show you how to disappear his body".³⁰ This public sermon by Qureshi, inciting hatred and violence, was attended by Malik Mumtaz Qadri.

After Taseer's assassination, the Barelwi organisation, Dawat-e-Islami, disowned Qadri, who had claimed to be a member of this organisation. The chief of Dawat-e-Islami, Maulana Ilyas Qadri, said that not everyone who wears the green turban represented "Dawat e Islami" and believed that taking the law into one's own hand was not permissible, even against the one who blasphemed against the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him).³¹

²⁵ "US aid to Sunni Ittehad Council backfired", *The Express Tribune*, 12th January 2012
<https://tribune.com.pk/story/320193/one-off-grant-us-aid-to-sunni-ittehad-council-backfired/>

²⁶ "Mumtaz Qadri admits killing Governor Salman Taseer", *BBC* <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12149607>

²⁷ Rob Crilly and Aoun Sahi, "Christian woman sentenced to death in Pakistan 'for blasphemy'," *The Telegraph*, November 9, 2010

²⁸ Hassan Choudary, "Taseer's remarks about blasphemy law", *The Tribune*, 5th January 2011

²⁹ Manzoor, U. "Events that led to Taseer's murder". *The News*, 6th January 2011

³⁰ "Hanif Qureshi's sermon which made Mumtaz Qadri to Kill Salman Taseer Gustakh e Rasool khanqah dogran", YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QEtLWYY6Tk>

³¹ "Mumtaz Qadri Qatil hay by Ameer e Ahle Sunnat" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPrBtOnjpBM>

Similarly, Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri, Pakistan's most senior Sunni Sufi cleric stated that Mumtaz Qadri was a murderer and should be punished as per Pakistani law. Dr. Qadri further explained "One might disagree with views of Salman Taseer but whatever he said could not be described as blasphemy. Even if one commits an act of blasphemy, they need to be dealt with in a court of law, and individuals are not allowed to take the law into their own hands".³²

While the assassination of Governor Taseer shocked many, not all condemned this cold-blooded murder in the "name of the Prophet". Thousands of Barelwis rallied in Qadri's defence and glorified him as a hero for his "religious honour and integrity."³³ Few days after the assassination, leading religious groups led a demonstration of over fifty thousand people in Karachi in support of the blasphemy law. During the rally, Qadri was lionized as a Muslim hero, while rally leaders sternly warned the crowds against mourning Taseer, whom they claimed had deviated from Islam. Some Barelwi leaders expressly condoned the murder of Governor Taseer. This position came as a shock to many, since the Barelwi school enjoys a reputation for moderation, and Barelwi scholars have been at the forefront in refuting the puritanical ideologies and have issued fatwas against suicide bombing and terrorism. Many UK based Barelwi scholars were also vocal in their support for Mumtaz Qadri, considering him a hero.³⁴ The glorification of Mumtaz Qadri set up a dangerous precedent among Barelwi Muslims of vigilante killings.

Two days after Taseer's assassination, over five hundred Barelwi clerics issued a statement that explicitly warned mosque leaders not to offer the Islamic funeral prayers for Salman Taseer.³⁵ "No Muslim should attend the funeral or even try to pray for Salman Taseer or even express any kind of regret or sympathy over the incident." The Imam of Lahore's historical Badshahi Mosque refused to lead ritual services for the dead governor. Subsequently, "cleric after cleric" refused to lead the funeral prayer for the murdered governor, according to Taseer's daughter. Other Barelwi organizations reportedly annulled Taseer's marriage to show they no longer considered him a Muslim.³⁶

Mumtaz Qadri was executed in February 2016. He had a massive funeral prayer with tens of thousands travelling from all over Pakistan to participate in his funeral. In their eyes Qadri was a "martyr" of the Prophet. Subsequently a shrine was built over his grave and he is now considered by many Barelwis as a true *Aashiq-e-Rasool*³⁷, Lover of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him).

As the connections between Mumtaz Qadri and the mainstream Barelwi school of thought came to light, it soon gave way to new concerns about the further increase of radical ideas into Pakistani society. The outpouring of Barelwi support for Mumtaz Qadri, after all,

³² "Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri on Mumtaz Qadri & Salman Taseer murder case. *YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zshzeJECy8>

³³ "Pakistan governor's suspected assassin hailed as hero". *Washington Times*, 5th January 2011 <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jan/5/pakistani-governor-buried-under-tightened-security/>

³⁴ BBC: "British Imams show support for Pakistani killer" *YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Orj-3Y5wuE>

³⁵ The statement was released from the platform of Jamaat Ahl-e-Sunnat Pakistan (JASP), a Barelvi group; See: Salman Siddiqui, "Hardline Stance: Religious bloc condones murder," *The Express Tribune*. 5th January 2011. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/99313/hardline-stance-religious-bloc-condones-murder/>

³⁶ "Top prayer leaders deny Taseer his rites," *Pakistan Today*. 6th January 2011. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/01/06/top-prayer-leaders-deny-taseer-his-rites/>

³⁷ "Executed Pakistani bodyguard Mumtaz Qadri praised as hero of Islam for supporting blasphemy law." TSMH. 2nd March 2016. <http://www.smh.com.au/world/executed-pakistani-bodyguard-mumtaz-qadri-praised-as-hero-of-islam-for-supporting-blasphemy-law-20160301-gn7uox.html>

showed that this could not simply be treated as an isolated act by a deranged individual. Mumtaz Qadri has inspired many thousands to become defenders of “the honour and sanctity of the Prophet”, in other words potential vigilante killers and murderers.

What accounts for the Barelwi school’s of thought’s stance against the militancy of the Taliban on the one hand, and its broad endorsement of the killing of Governor Taseer on the other? Barelwis have condemned the violence by the Taliban who act “in the name of God”, but many are now condoning acts of violence “in the name of the Prophet”. To understand the Barelwi response to Taseer’s assassination, it must be situated within the broader context of Pakistan’s religious politics and the sectarian struggle among competing Islamic movements. This dynamic has contributed to the rise in recent years of new forms of Barelwi activism and communalist assertion. Although Barelwis received support from the PPP Government because they produced counter narrative to the militants, the Barelwis do not have any political stronghold like the Deobandi and Wahhabi Muslims in Pakistan. The Deobandi and Wahhabi Muslims are represented by Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam in the National Assembly of Pakistan.

Radicalisation by Barelwi Ulama

The Latin word “Radix” or “root” means buried in the root of fundamental.³⁸ It shows that a radical is a person who wishes to bring the fundamental, political and social change and therefore radicalisation is a mind-set by which people adopt extreme views and beliefs, being prepared to take violent measures for political and religious gains.

Wilner and Dubouloz define radicalisation as the following: “Radicalisation is a personal process in which individuals adopt extreme political, social and religious ideals and aspirations, and where the attainment of particular goals justifies the use of indiscriminate violence, It is both a mental and emotional process that prepares and motivates an individual to pursue violent behaviour”³⁹ It is interesting to note that radicalisation does not always lead to violence in the initial stages. So, a slow process of radicalisation may take place while there is no realization of the gravity of the situation.

In contemporary discourse on religious radicalisation, religion is often believed to be at the centre of one’s radicalisation. Radical ideas are instilled in common people, who have very little understanding of their own religion, in a way that they consider them absolute. Religious radicalisation can be defined as “a process by which a person or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo, or rejects and/or undermines the contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice”.⁴⁰ Robert Mandel refers to religious radicalisation as, “an increase in and/or reinforcing extremism in the thinking, sentiments, and/or behaviour of individuals and/or groups of individuals”.⁴¹

³⁸ Merriam Webster Dictionary, MA, USA, 2016

³⁹ A.S. Wilner and C.J. Dubouloz, “Homegrown and transformative learning: an interdisciplinary approach to understanding radicalisation”, *Global Change, Peace & Security* 22:1 (2010): 38

⁴⁰ A.S. Wilner and C.J. Dubouloz, “Homegrown and transformative learning: an interdisciplinary approach to understanding radicalisation”, *Global Change, Peace & Security* 22:1 (2010): 38

⁴¹ David R. Mandel. “Radicalisation, what does it mean?” in *Indigenous Terrorism: Understanding and Addressing the root causes of root causes of radicalisation among groups with an immigrant heritage in Europe*. IOS Press, 2010

Alex Schmid, quoting Dalgaard Nielsen's study, came up with six stages of the process of religious radicalisation: [1] Identifying a problem as not just a misfortune, but an injustice; [2] constructing a moral justification for violence (religious, ideological, political); [3] blaming the victims ("it is their own fault"); [4] dehumanizing the victims through language and symbols; [5] displacing responsibility (God or other authorities ordered the individual to commit the act of violence) or diffusing responsibility (the group, not the individual is responsible); and [6] misconstruing or minimizing the harmful effects (by using euphemisms or by contrasting to other acts which are worse).⁴²

Stage 6 of Nielsen's study discusses the construction of moral justification for violence. In the context of this essay, we are discussing religious justification for violence. The religious justification of the violence perpetrated to victims of Barelwi extremism is that [1] Islamic ruling on those who commit blasphemy is only murder, [2] Those who commit blasphemy deserve to be killed and [3] It is an expression of Love for the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) to kill those who disrespect him.

Numerous speeches by a segment of the Barelwi clerics have promoted these three narratives in their speeches and writings.⁴³

Popular extremist narrative "Gustakh e Rasool ki ek hi Saza..."

It is important to mention that all Barelwi Muslims are particularly characterised by their devotion to the veneration of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him), which is common among all Sunni Sufi Muslims. Practises that show reverence of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) are an integral part of the Barelwi understanding of Islam. The commemoration of the Mawlid (birth of Prophet Muhammad), recitation of Naat (poems honouring and praising Prophet Muhammad), Salat o Salaam (Sending Greetings to Prophet Muhammad, particularly after the Friday prayers, and reciting Naat written by Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan) are such practises. Barelwis believe, like most other Muslims, that a true Muslim must be an *Aashiq-e-Rasool*, Lover of the Prophet. With Love and devotion so central to the Barelwi understanding of Islam, Barelwis feel that it is a religious duty to protect "Namoos e Risalat", the sanctity and honour of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) and propagate actively that there is to be no compromise with anyone who expresses insolence and blasphemous remarks towards Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him).

A narrative that has become increasingly popular among Barelwis is "Gustakh e Rasool ki ek hi saza, Sir tan se Judaa" (There is only one punishment for the blasphemer of the Prophet, separate his head from his body). There is even Naat (poetry) with such wordings that promote this narrative and slogan.⁴⁴ One of the most watched Pakistani religious tv channel, ARY QTV, has aired such Naat performances occasionally.⁴⁵

⁴² Alex P. Schmid, Al-Qaeda's "Single narrative" and attempts to develop counter narratives: The state of knowledge, "International Centre for Counter Terrorism The Hague" ICCT, Research paper quoting A. Dalgaard-Nielson, studying violent radicalisation in Europe 2, Working paper, no 2008/03 (2008): 10.

⁴³ Irfan Shah Mashadi, Maulana Khadim Rizwi, Mufti Hanif Qureshi, Ashraf Jalali and many others.

⁴⁴ Aftab Qadri, "Gustakh-e-Nabi ki Aik Saza Sar tan se Juda" YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyPmYFVefr8> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZRu1lnXvzY>

⁴⁵ "Gustakh-e-Nabi ki Aik Saza Sar tan se Juda" ARY QTV, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXn8d__XlqQ

Ever since the extension of support to Mumtaz Qadri from most Barelwi clerics, there have been other incidents involving Barelwi Muslims trying to “defend the honour” of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him). Pakistani immigrant Amir Cheema, who belonged to the Barelwi movement, attempted to murder the German publisher of Jyllanden Posten cartoons, which posted caricatures that outraged many Muslims and led to many protests in the Muslim World.⁴⁶ Barelwis were the most active in South Asia to voice their condemnation of the caricatures. In 2016, Pakistani taxi driver Tanveer Ahmed, a member of Barelwi missionary group “Dawat e Islami,” travelled from Bradford to Glasgow to avenge the “dishonour” of the Prophet. He stabbed Asad Shah repeatedly outside his shop in an attack motivated by religious ideology. According to Ahmed, Assad Shah had committed blasphemy by claiming prophethood. Therefore, it was Tanveer’s religious duty to put an end to Shah’s life. Ahmed is also celebrated as a champion and true “Ashiq-e-Rasool” in Barelwi circles.⁴⁷ He has drawn inspiration from Mumtaz Qadri.⁴⁸

Pro-Blasphemy Law Movement *Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah*

In August 2015 Barelwi clerics formed a new political party, *Tehreek Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah*, in Nishtar Park, the same park where a few years ago leaders of the *Sunni Tehreek* were massacred by a Deobandi militant.⁴⁹ The party is headed by Maulana Khadim Rizvi, a prominent supporter of both Mumtaz Qadri and Tanveer Qadri. The movement opposes any change in the blasphemy law of Pakistan and states that the hanging of Mumtaz Qadri was unjustifiable.⁵⁰ This is a dangerous precedent and anyone who opposes this movement is quickly labelled as one who opposes the “honour and sanctity of Prophet Muhammad” (Peace and Blessings upon Him), and therefore, a blasphemer.

In November 2017, they rallied in Islamabad and mobilised thousands of Sunni Sufi and Barelwi Muslims in the name of protecting the “honour and sanctity” of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings upon Him). Khadim Rizvi claimed that the Pakistan government removed “solemnly swear” from the Nomination Form and intended to change the blasphemy law and the implications of Khatm-e-Nabuwwat in the Pakistani Constitution, which declares Ahmadis as non-Muslim religious minority. Despite the denial of the Pakistani Government regarding any change in the Constitution about the blasphemy law and Khatm e Nabuwwat, a lot of uproar was created because *Tehreek e Labbaik* was successful in spreading the rhetoric that this had to do with the protection of “honour and sanctity of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings upon Him). Various protests across Pakistan had been organised by *Tehreek e Labbaik Pakistan*.

Pakistani politician Jibran Nasir’s observation regarding the March and the recent activities of *Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan* are as follows: “Maulana Khadim Rizvi has not only successfully established his relevance through the March in Islamabad with votes in both constituency NA-120 and Constituency NA-4, he has also branded himself and his radical views as the new face of Barelwi political leadership forcing the older, relatively peaceful, groups to fall in line. As extensive coverage and proscription of Deobandi militant group Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat and *Sipah Sahabah Pakistan* under ATA makes them a liability for mainstream parties limiting

⁴⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORGhEXtEQ1Y>

⁴⁷ “Why is Tanveer Ahmed a hero to some hardliners in Pakistan”, *BBC* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YT_Y-9nI3L8

⁴⁸ “How Pakistan inspired the Glasgow shopkeeper”, *BBC* <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37032419>

⁴⁹ Website of *Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan* www.labbaik.pk

⁵⁰ Website of *Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan* www.labbaik.pk

scope of public electoral alliance in 2018, *Tehreek Labbaik* will fill in the space with far bigger numbers, charged workers and no track record of being banned under Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act.”⁵¹

Jibran Nasir mentions how *Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan* is strategically replacing the Deobandi militant parties. It must be noted that Maulana Khadim Rizvi is being referred as *Ameer ul Mujahideen* by his followers and a Facebook page with over 48,000 followers also mentions him as Ameer ul Mujahideen.⁵² Such a title is common among Deobandi and Wahhabi militants, but its use among Barelwi Muslims is new and should raise alarm bells. Khadim Rizvi and his associates have publicly used profane language⁵³, while ironically claiming they are protectors of the “honour of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings upon Him)”. Khadim Rizvi has invoked curse on those who disagree with him.⁵⁴

The striking contrast with the response of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings upon Him) to those who insulted and offended him is immense. Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings upon Him) faced a very harsh response from the people of Taif, whom he invited to Islam. He was injured and his clothes were soaked in blood. In Makkah Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) faced religious persecution for 12 years. But in all those years, not once did He invoke curse on those who insulted him. When He was asked to curse his enemies, He (Peace and Blessings upon Him) responded: “Verily I am not sent to invoke curses, I was only as a Mercy”.⁵⁵

But it gets stranger. Maulana Khadim Rizvi has claimed publicly in a gathering that Mumtaz Qadri's dead body came back to life in the ambulance when his father entered the ambulance to see him.⁵⁶ In the same gathering he claimed that when his follower travelled to the grave of Mumtaz Qadri, he witnessed two swords appearing from the grave.⁵⁷

It is hard to imagine that these extremists have something to do with the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him). They are no different than puritan Wahhabi militants. Deobandi and Wahhabi militants also believe they love Allah and are willing to die for Him. Similarly, these Barelwi extremists believe they love the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) and are willing to die for Him (Peace and Blessings be upon Him). Their methodology is no different from that of Deobandi and Wahhabi militants.

⁵¹ <https://twitter.com/MJibranNasir/status/934067325535490048>

⁵² <https://www.facebook.com/Ameer-ul-Mujahideen-103859166624857/>

⁵³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cx9S8g-JOKs>

⁵⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNyFgGD8s2Y>

⁵⁵ Al-Musim, Jaame al-Sahih

⁵⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_X3et4kgm4o

⁵⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_X3et4kgm4o

Blasphemy law in Pakistan

The idea that the interpretation of blasphemy law in Pakistan is based on consensus in the Islamic tradition is a myth. In this chapter I discuss the background of Pakistani blasphemy law and how it is in contrast with the opinion of leading Hanafi jurists.

The blasphemy law has its origin since the time of British India in 1860, Pakistan inherited these laws when it came in existence in 1947. Between 1980 and 1986 a number of clauses were added to the laws by the regime of Zia-ul-Haq, who wanted to “Islamize” the country. In 1980, making derogatory remarks against Islamic personages was made an offence, carrying a maximum penalty of three years jail time. In 1982, another clause prescribed life imprisonment for “intentional” desecration of the Qur’an.⁵⁸

On the 9th of July 1986, the blasphemy law was again amended to include the death penalty as the maximum penalty for blasphemy. The bill was passed in a hurry under the pressure of some clerics. During this session, that led to the passage of 295-C, the bill was approved without having been reviewed and debated by Muslim jurists. Barelwi scholar Shah Turab-ul-Haq Qadri claimed in this session that there is an *Ijmaa* (consensus) that the only punishment for blasphemy of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) is the death penalty.⁵⁹

Ibn Taimiya’s *Al-Sarim al-Maslool* was presented claiming that there is an *Ijmaa* on the death penalty for those who commit blasphemy. However, Ibn Taimiya states in his book that according to the Hanafi school there is no death penalty for a non-Muslim who commits blasphemy.⁶⁰ Hanafi jurist, Ibn Abideen al-Shami, was also wrongly quoted as having stated that there is an *Ijmaa*. Ibn Abideen Shami, however, stated “If the individual in question is a non-Muslim, he will not be killed”.⁶¹

In short, the parliament was provided with inaccurate information on the Islamic stance on blasphemy law and the following clause (295C) was approved:

“Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.”

⁵⁸ “What are Pakistan’s blasphemy laws?”, BBC, 6th November 2014.

⁵⁹ *The National Assembly of Pakistan, Debates, Official Report*, Wednesday 9th July 1986
<https://www.scribd.com/document/327051790/9th-July-Parliamentary-Debate-on-295C>

⁶⁰ *The National Assembly of Pakistan, Debates, Official Report*, Wednesday 9th July 1986
<https://www.scribd.com/document/327051790/9th-July-Parliamentary-Debate-on-295C>

⁶¹ Muhammad Amin Ibn Abidin, *Fatawa Shaamia*, (Dar Aalam al-Kutub, Riad, KSA, special edition year 2003), Volume 6, p. 344

Sources that can be turned against this narrative

There are various sources within the Islamic tradition that can be used against the narrative that there is only one punishment for those that insult the Prophet, death.

The Qur'an, being the first primary source of Islamic law, does not mention the death penalty for blasphemy. The Qur'an states that the punishment for blasphemy will be in the Hereafter and does not mention any punishment for blasphemy in this life:

Indeed, those who abuse Allah and His Messenger - Allah has cursed them in this world and the Hereafter and prepared for them a humiliating punishment.⁶²

The Qur'an advised Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) to respond with patience, calmness and graceful avoidance to the insults and defamation of the Pagans. The Pagans of Makkah initiated a campaign of character assassination against the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him). Rumours were spread that the Prophet was a "sorcerer", a "madman" and a "liar", yet Allah commanded the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) to be patient:

Be patient over what they say and avoid them with gracious avoidance.⁶³

The insults of the Pagans of Makkah deeply upset and hurt the Prophet and his companions, yet the Qur'an does not prescribe any revenge for them. Instead Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) was informed that he should expect more insults and abuse from non-Muslims, but he should remain patient:

You will surely be tested in your possessions and in yourselves, and you will surely hear from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah much abuse. But if you are patient and fear Allah, that is of the matters requiring resolve.⁶⁴

In other verses Muslims are commanded to avoid those who mock Islam and not to engage with them until they enter into a different conversation:

When you see those, who engage in offensive discourse concerning Our verses, then turn away from them until they enter into another conversation.⁶⁵

There are many recorded incidents in the life of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) in which He was mocked, defamed, abused and even physically attacked. Despite all of this abuse Prophet Muhammad responded with patience, forgiveness, and mercy.

Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) was physically attacked in Taif and the blood from his wounds had drenched His clothes. And yet when was asked to curse the very same people who treated Him in this horrific manner, His response was: "Verily I am not sent to invoke curses, I was only sent as a Mercy".⁶⁶

⁶² Al-Qur'an, 33:57

⁶³ Al-Qur'an, 73:10

⁶⁴ Al-Qur'an, 3:186

⁶⁵ Al-Qur'an, 6:68

⁶⁶ Al-Musim, Jaame al-Sahih

A group of Jews sought permission to visit Prophet Muhammad in Madinah while he was the Head of the Madinah State. When they were admitted, they said, “Death be upon you.” Umm al-Mumineen Aisha, wife of the Prophet, responded to the Jews: “Rather death and the curse of Allah be upon you!”. Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) addressed His wife Aisha and said: “O Aisha, Allah is kind and He loves kindness in all matters”⁶⁷

Badr ud-Din al-Ayni [d. 1453], a Hanafi jurist, comments on this Hadith and states: “Al-Bukhari has adopted the method of the people of Kufi on this issue (referring to Hanafis), that if someone curses or berates the Prophet and is a non-Muslim citizen, then he is rebuked but he is not killed. This is the opinion of Al-Thauri.”⁶⁸

These are just a few of the many examples of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him), which highlight that He forgave those that insulted Him.

There are some narrations that are often repeated in the lectures of the Barelwi extremists and wrongly interpret as justification for the murder of those that commit blasphemy. Here I will mention only a few. The topic of blasphemy requires a much more detailed essay in order to do justice with it. I intend to write this in the near future (in-sha Allah).

For example, a narration of Abu Dawood states that a Jewish woman used to abuse the Prophet and a man strangled her till she died.⁶⁹ Upon hearing this the Prophet declared that no recompense was payable for her blood. This is a weak Hadith due to the Tadlees of one of its narrators, Mughayra bin Muqsim.

Another narration states that the Prophet instructed the murder of Ibn Khatal even though he was holding the cover of the Kaabah and taking refuge in the Kaabah. Although this Hadith is Sahih, it has nothing to do with the issue of Blasphemy. Ibn Khatal, whose name was Hilal ibn Abd Allah), had killed a slave in fit of fury because the slave neglected to prepare his meal. He then fled to Makkah seeking refuge, fearing that Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon Him) would execute him for his crime.⁷⁰

The death penalty given to Kaab bin Ashraf, often misunderstood by many as result of his apostasy and blasphemy, was in fact sanctioned because of his active treason. Al-Asqalani states that the reason behind his death is the fact that he broke his covenant with the Muslims, travelled to the Quraysh in Makkah and made a pact with the Qurash that they would join forces in waging war upon the Muslims.⁷¹

There are also other Hadiths misused and misunderstood in this regard and they are all weak. It is important to remember that in Islamic Jurisprudence, the Qur'an always supersedes all the Hadith and when the Hadith contradict with the Qur'an these are not to be accepted.

I am concluding this chapter with the views of major Hanafi jurists that make it clear that the predominant narrative on blasphemy “Gustakh e Rasool ki ek hi Sazaa..” entertained by many Barelwi Muslims, who happen to be followers of the Hanafi school of thought, is inaccurate, false and its violent rhetoric is not shared by prominent Hanafi jurists.

⁶⁷ Al-Bukhari, *Jaame Al-Sahih* 6528

⁶⁸ , Al-Aini, Badr ud-Din, *Umdat al-Qadri fi Sharah Shahih al-Bukhari* 34,412

⁶⁹ Abu Dawood, *Al-Sunan*, No. 4349

⁷⁰ Mamar Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muhammad*, p.329

⁷¹ Al-Asqalani, Ibn Hajar, *Fath Al-Bari* 9/96

Abu Bakr Al-Jassas [d. 981 CE], prominent Hanafi jurist, stated in his book *Mukhtasar Ikhtilaf* in the chapter titled “Dhimmi (Non-Muslim living in lands controlled by Muslims) insulting the Prophet” that according to Hanafi Imams, a *Dhimmi* (this is a non-Muslim citizen of an ‘Islamic State’) is not killed but instead *ta’dheer* (discretionary punishment, which is a *maximum* of lashing twenty-nine) is applicable.⁷²

As proof for his stance, Al-Jassas mentions the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad about a Jewish person who insulted and cursed the Prophet when they were greeting one another –yet the Prophet never killed him nor did he order the *Sahabah* (companions) to kill him.

Al-Tahawi [d.933 CE] also stated “If a Dhimmi insults the Prophet, he will not be killed but instead will be disciplined. This is because they have been left alone to practise their religion, and their religion includes worshiping someone beside God and rejecting the Prophet. The proof of this is Jews visited the Prophet and they said, ‘Damn you!’, and the Prophet *replied*, ‘you too’ but he did not order from them to be killed.”⁷³

Taqi ud Din Al-Subki [d.1355 CE], who was also Chief Judge of Damascus, stated “If a non-Muslim insults the Prophet, he will not be punished by death. A non-Muslim is not killed for his disbelief. These are bigger sins than blasphemy”

Al-Marghinani writes in his Hanafi textbook *Al-Hidayah*: “Insulting the Prophet is Kufr (disbelief). Since the non-Muslims are not killed for their Kufr, they will not be killed for any addition in their Kufr”⁷⁴.

The founder of the Barelwi movement, Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan, had endorsed *Fath al-Mubin wa Tanbeeh al-Wahhabiyyeen*, a book which also enjoyed the approval of over 300 scholars of India, written by Maulana Mansoor Ali of Dar al-Uloom Farangi Mahl. In this book, Maulana Mansoor Ali compiled Fatwas from the Hanafi perspective. Interestingly, the founder of the Deobandi school, Maulana Mahmood Hasan, also endorsed this book. Therefore, the founders of the Deobandi and Barelwi schools have endorsed the Hanafi position: that a non-Muslim cannot be killed for a single offense of blasphemy and must be pardoned.⁷⁵

⁷² Al-Jassas , Abu Bakr Ahmad bin Ali Al-Razi, *Mukhtasar Ikhtilaf* , Dar al-Bashair, Beirut, Lebanon, first edition year 1995, Volume 2, p. 504

⁷³ Abu Jafar al-Tahawi, *Mukhtasar Tahawi*, Dar al – Bashair, first edition year 2010, Beirut, Lebanon), Volume 6, p. 142

⁷⁴ Burhan al-Din al-Marghinani, *Al-Hidayah fi Sharh Bidayat al-Mubtadi*, Idarat al-Quran wal-uloom al-Islamiyyah, Karachi, Pakistan, first edition, 1417 hijri), Volume 4, p. 138

⁷⁵ Mansoor Ali, *Al-Fath al-Mubin wa Tanbih al-Wahhabiyyeen* p.487

Conclusion

Pakistan faces generally a huge problem of dealing with religious extremism which has gradually grown over the years. Events such as banning or burning of books, attacking and killing people who are accused of blasphemy have a great impact on society and increases its tendencies to be more extreme. Religious minorities are attacked in the name of religion and blasphemy.

This essay has highlighted the emerging extremism among the Barelwi Muslims of Pakistan. Although Barelwis have not reached the magnitude of extremism yet like their Deobandi counterparts, the developments in certain segments of the sect and its support by the majority is of great concern. Many Sunni Sufi scholars have raised their concerns for this rise of extremism and growing trend of vigilante killings in the name of “protecting the honour of the Prophet”. Most Barelwish condone this form of extremism and the perpetrators of such violence are hailed as heroes or martyrs.

There is a need for Muslim scholars within the Barelwi sect to be more vocal against this extremism by highlighting how this contradicts the Islamic tradition and the understanding of Hanafi jurists on this issue to clarify to the masses the real position of Islam on blasphemy.

Additionally, the Blasphemy law in Pakistan does not reflect the tradition and must be re-examined in the indiscriminate and heavy-handed application of a death penalty to a population (non-Muslims) it was perhaps not meant for.

There is also an urgent need to organise and implement a uniformed education system and syllabus across the country in both schools and madrassahs. This should be completely devoid of bias, prejudice of religion, violence, and intolerance. It should contain an equilibrium of religious, spiritual, moral and modern education. The rigidity in the minds of the younger generations when it comes to religion and religious ideas needs to be softened to allow them to accept other ideas.

The media has also a vital role to play in this endeavour. They can be a highly useful mechanism which can help to eradicate all forms of extremism. Parts of the public who have leniencies towards terrorists can be positively reached by effective media campaigns.

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