

THE RISE OF WAHHABISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH TALIBANISATION IN THE SWAT REGION OF KHYBER PUKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN (2007-2009)

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Abstract

This study explores the rise of Wahhabism—an Arabian-based socio-religious reform movement emphasizing Islamic monotheism—and its ideological and operational intersections with Talibanisation in the Swat Valley of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, from 2007 to 2009. Wahhabism's assimilation with Al-Qaeda's transnational agenda provided ideological impetus to the Taliban's efforts in Swat, particularly their campaign for the implementation of Shariah law. This paper critically examines the Taliban's explicit objectives, which included dismantling the region's socio-cultural norms shaped by entrenched Sufi traditions, as well as their broader ideological ambitions. The analysis draws on data from printed and electronic media, Taliban communications, and personal observations, supplemented by eyewitness accounts. The findings suggest that, while the Taliban ostensibly sought to replace the existing judicial system with Shariah law, their insurgency also aimed to suppress women's rights, challenge Sufi practices, and oppose Western democratic values. These efforts are interpreted as a confluence of ideological commitment and a strategic endeavor to align with Pakistan's geo-political objectives in the region.

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Introduction

Wahhabism, an Arabian based socio-religious reform movement, primarily accentuated on the Islamic monotheism, being diluted by local culture and customs, held sway over the local people of the formerly princely State of Swat, after its merger with the state of Pakistan in the later quarter of the twentieth century. The tendency got impetus in 1990s during the Wahhabi-inspired Tahrik Nifaz-i-Shari't-i-Muhammadi (TNSM) unending struggle for the implementation of *shari'h* laws in the courts of Malakand division.¹ Following 9/11, the Taliban, an off-shoot of TNSM, campaigned for *shari'h* laws to be institutionalized in latter and spirit and beside proselytized against the local norms in particular related to Western values or ideals. In July 2007, subsequent to Red Mosque incident, the Taliban prevailed over major part of the valley and thereby implemented their literal version of Islam on society and hindered every so-called obstacle in the way of their asserted sacred cause. To set believable model Islamic society: rigorous gender segregation was forced; the traditions of Sufi Islam and other prevalent norms for being believably contrary with their literal concept of Islamic monotheism were precluded; and brought into play the heretical politics against democracy and electoral politics for being Western constructs and a main hurdle in the way of affirmed Islamic unity.

Origination and Major Doctrines of Wahhabism

In eighteenth century, a religious reform movement, popularly known as Wahhabism² began in Saudi Arabia under the guidance of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703—1792),³ to generally purify basic beliefs of Islam being defiled and polluted by local culture and customs.⁴ A strict and literal interpretation of *tauhid* (Islamic monotheism) put Wahhabism at odds with popular beliefs of ‘Sufism’ that accepts the cult of saints and shrines and tomb visitation⁵ which claimed to be diluted the moral basics of the community and destabilized its authority structure.⁶ Such disciplines and other prevalent practices and customs like trust on talismans, magic, sorcery, astrology, were classified as *bid‘h* (innovations) and *shirk* (polytheism).⁷

The Wahhabis who preferred themselves to be called ‘*mu’hidun*’ (Unitarian), sought to revive Islam in its original and pure state from the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), uncontaminated by modern influences.⁸ While recognizing *tauhid* the basic concept of Islam, they argued that the acknowledgment of exceptional creator without a partner was inadequate for correct belief and must be joined with ‘pure’ Islamic behaviour. They also interpreted the Divine Law without taking into account the ‘diacritical and indeterminate hermeneutic of classical jurisprudence’ for being corruption of purity of Islamic faith and

law'.⁹ They stressing God's omnipotence and the parity of all men before Him and discarded the conciliatory role generally credited to the saints. They also resisted the belief that the Prophet was set apart from the rest of mankind in any way except for the fact that he was the messenger of God. It was also opposed 'to address prayers to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); to recite verses in his praise; to honor his tomb; or to celebrate the anniversary of his birth (*Milad al-Nabi*).¹⁰

Wahhabism disallows many customs in which other Muslims involve, such as listening to particular kinds of music, sketching of human beings or other living things that have a soul. They branded all Shi'h polytheists and unbelievers for their lack of faith. They opposed the rule of the majority in democratic regimes, thereby believing democracy as opposing religion to God's monotheism. Electoral politics and parliaments are measured solely a places for '*shirk* and *jahiliyah*'.¹¹

Wahhabis are blamed for being 'intolerant' particularly in its treatment of women. They emphasizes that woman for reasons of modesty, should wrap their bodies fully in public with '*bayah* (full length cloak), *hijab* (head covering), *niqab* (face covering) and even gloves'.¹² Being literalist, they enlists more than twenty crimes punishable by execution including rape, murder, armed robbery, repeated drug use, adultery, homosexuality, drug-trafficking, prostitution and apostasy.¹³

The Evolution of Wahhabism in Swat Region

The Wahhabi Movement arrived at South Asia in mid eighteenth century as Shah Waliullah (1703—1762) initiated a socio-religious reforms that ‘emerged out of the concern for the future of the *ulama* as well as Islam in India in the face of declining power of the Mughals’.¹⁴ His successors, most notably Shah Muhammad Ismail and his student Sayyed Ahmad Ra’e Bareli (1786–1831) carried on the reform agenda more particularly related to the notion of *tauhid* polluted by Indo-Persian influence.¹⁵

In the early quarter of nineteenth century, with the advent of the British and Sikh in North-West India, the Wahhabi’s (also known Hindustani Mujahidin and led by Bareli) started *jihad* activities against the Sikh and ‘recalcitrant’ Pukhtun tribes in order to create a space for Waliullah’s vision.¹⁶ This happened for the first time in 1826, after the establishment of an Islamic emirate with Wahhabite credentials, in Peshawar and in the Yusufzai territories of North West Frontier region of India, including Swat.¹⁷ The internecine wars between the local Pukhtuns and followers of Bareli led them to flee to the area of Balakot, wherein they were defeated and killed by the Sikh Army in 1831.¹⁸

After the incident of Balakot, a new political history of Swat and surrounding areas began as a new emerging but variant Islamic religious alliance between Akhund Abdul Ghafur (a Sufi

mystic in a local *Naqshbandiyah* line)¹⁹, and Sayyed Akbar Shah of Sathanah²⁰ (the treasurer of Bareli and the future king of Swat) came into being. This connection between *tariqat* and *shari't* appeared to be purely a political move to establish a centralised authority to coordinate resistance against the inevitable British India's move into Swat. The alliance though failed to yield the desired results due to the divisive course of strategy and ideological differences between the Akhund and the King, but 'the territory was at least saved from the direct intervention of the British India, until 1895'.²¹

In 1863, the British government of India launched a punitive expedition against the Hindustani Mujahidin, in Buner area. The tribesmen of Swat, Dir, Buner and Bajawar rouse against the British India by inspiring for the call of *jihad*. Though the Akhund opposed the doctrines of the Hindustani Mujahidin and decreed them Wahhabis or heretics, but the circumstances compelled him to participate in *jihad* against the British India, as in case of the success of the tribesmen his authority and prestige would have been lowered.²²

In the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, after the foundation of Dar al-'ulum Deoband,²³ a concerted 'anti-colonial stance'; to revive and reform 'unsullied and pure' Islam as against 'selective and intellectual' response to modernism; and 'shared commitment' of pan-Islamism, both Deobandis and Wahhabis/Mujahidin turned the north-west region of India,

including Swat, a sanctuary for ‘military offensive’ against the expansionism of British India. Though the alliance were militarily overpowered and many of their members were tried in the sequence known as ‘Wahhabi Trials’ in the 1870s but some of the group’s activists were extracted into the Swat, Bunir and Bajawar areas.²⁴

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, the incursion of the anti-British India elements (Turko-German alliance, Afghanistan, the Russian Bolsheviks and Indian nationalists)²⁵ in the area then known as Yaghistan (the land of unruly) of which Swat was part, from India and their supposed political alliance with the Hindustani Mujahidin gave impetus to wahhabi ideology in the region.²⁶ The cry of ‘Islam in danger’ being sedulously raised in Swat and Bunir, yielded attacks on the British in and around the area of Swat.²⁷

Amidst the First World War, the formation of the Princely State of Swat (1917) under the headships of Mian Gul Abdul Wadud alias Bacha Saib, had changed the political and religious landscape of the area. Being a close collaborator with the Government of British India and large religious adherents of *tariqat*, he instantly expatriated the clergy class being inclined to Wahhabism.²⁸ He utilized the traditional religious class as bureaucrats and administrators of the state²⁹ and to diminish the revolutionary tendencies and alien religious ideology, essentially imparting religious education to the people turned out to be the

‘sole’ responsibility of the state. Patronization of religion beside other social reforms gave remarkable results and hence ‘Swat evolved from being the most troublesome region to being the most tractable and the most advanced’.³⁰

In 1969, Swat State was brought to an end and hence the Pakistani State directly controlled the policies and decisions that would otherwise be made and implemented locally. The Russian’s invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and simultaneous Islamic revolution in Iran³¹ has transformed the socio-religious landscape across the Durand Line, including Malakand division of which Swat is part.³² The petro-dollar on one side helped to finance the Afghan resistance and at the same time propagated the Wahhabi ideology based on the ‘most patriarchal and exclusionary orientations’ within Pakistan’s political circles³³ which one analyst has referred to as the ‘Saudisation of Pakistani culture’.³⁴ Religiosity which had remained in the pre-merger period in consonance with the cultural inclusiveness has been transformed into return to a strict Islam stripped of local customs and culture, in the post-merger period.³⁵ Similarly, the socio-politically stigmatized status of the *mulla* was converted into, what Asim Sajjad Akhtar has termed, ‘political *mulla*’, in 1980s.³⁶

By 1990s, the ‘Kashmir Intifada’ largely supported by the Pakistani militant groups³⁷ and the parallel rise of Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan and TNSM in Malakand division (mainly

led by Jam‘t Isha‘t al-Tauhid wal-Sunnah (JITS) also known as Panjpiris)³⁸ setback the prevalent local culture and furthered Wahhabi ideology in the region. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the Al-Qaeda-Taliban nexus (Wahhabi/Salafi and Deobandi/Hanafi), essentially based on faith (monotheism) and practices,³⁹ radicalized society so much so that the observance of symbolic Islam and public display of religiosity turned out to be a common phenomena in the region.⁴⁰

After 9/11, the created fraction between the West and Islamic world, and the resultant US-led NATO forces attack on Afghanistan with the help of Musharraf regime to dismantle Al-Qaeda-Taliban nexus a ‘safe haven’ and ‘local franchises’ in the ex FATA region and settled areas of KP have been created.⁴¹ Inside Pukhtun’s built, Al-Qaeda and its ideologues for strategic and political purposes redefined Ibn-i-Taimyya’s (1263–1328) concept of ‘*al-wal’a al-bar’a*’ (friendship and enmity) and drove a thin line of demarcation between the Muslims, non-Muslims and West-aligned Muslim regimes.⁴² During 2007-09 Swat slept from the government control and virtually came under the influence of the Taliban. They acquired an army of volunteers for enforcing Islamic *shari‘h* in the valley and eliminated what they perceived to be un-Islamic practices.⁴³

Taliban’s Prospective Plan

The rhetorical discourse of the Taliban was to install *shari‘h* laws in the courts of Malakand division, which they claimed to be their

legal and constitutional rights. To achieve the objectives a prototype early Islamic model, which was distinctly separated in terms of goals, strategy and course of action, was followed. The first in the sequence was *d'wah*⁴⁴ (proselytization) period, followed by *iqamat-i-din* (establishment of *din*) and culminated on *isteqamat 'la-din* (permanency on *din*). *D'wah* period was specified for achieving exclusive unity; ensued by boycott from the prevalent socio-cultural and religio-political system; and finally to defend the boundaries of Islam against the aggression of occupying forces of infidels and apostate regimes of Muslim majority regions through armed struggle what it was referred to be '*jihad bi difa*' (defensive *jihad*).⁴⁵

In *d'wah* period (2005-07) as the Taliban has achieved substantial popular and logistic support, the ill-conceived plan of the government of tackling the *Lal Masjid* incident in mid July 2007, had altered their worldviews.⁴⁶ They revolted against the prevalent socio-cultural system; challenged writ of the government; and upraised against the newly employed law enforcement agencies and all those political and landed elites who in one way or the other have helped or sided with them.⁴⁷ As the unwilling or incapable government machinery failed to cope with the rising tide of militancy and lawlessness, the Taliban came out with new plan. Many judicial centers were organized, in various localities, for the explicit and quick dispensation of justice, where terror and fear usually reigned supreme.⁴⁸ They

proscribed the prevalent local customs which was referred to be un-Islamic and in some cases the offenders were brutally killed.⁴⁹ Adulterers and adulteress were killed without keeping in view the rational commandments (four eye witnesses who are known to be truthful, upright and good moral character), as laid down in the holy Quran and Sunnah.⁵⁰ Smoking, drugs dealing, hashish, listening music and dancing, staring at women were assumed un-Islamic, and any person found to be guilty were publically flogged.⁵¹ Symbolic Islam of keeping long hair and beard, covering of head and barren ankles were strictly practiced and in some cases forcefully implemented.⁵²

Playful activities like listening music, kite flying, watching television, DVDs, dish antenna and other electronic devices, were banned. Female education was forbidden. Not only were women allowed working at home, they could not step out of the house without the company of a male. These cultural impositions happened alongside religious intolerance against co-religionists what they were referred to be *ulamā` su'* (scholars of falsehood). They also demolished non-Muslim's artefacts more particularly the statues of Budha in various localities of Swat.⁵³ The effect of this mindset on the social religious practices and the society was so enormous that bringing an end or a halt to a number of rituals and practices; and the impact still prevails, as they have influenced the mindset, beliefs, and thoughts of a section of the population.⁵⁴

Swatis Women and Taliban: Agents or Victims

In academia the enigma whether women were agents or victims of the Taliban, is still to be figured out. However, it was a fact that in the early stage of the Taliban movement, the women through FM radios were taken into confidence by manipulating their hardships in the typical Pukhtun's society for the explicit purpose of disseminating their worldviews among the cross section of the society. Keeping in views socio-economic status and nature of problems related to women, in the initial stage substantial part of FM channels were dedicated to them. By exploiting the core concept of taunt prevailing in Pukhtun's society the women were prompted to motivate their males for *jihad*.⁵⁵

Another contributing factor of women is said to be their over emphasize donation in the early reformative phase of the Taliban. It is a proven fact that the women and the charity they offered would receive considerable coverage on FM but there are no documentary evidences available to prove the form, kinds and quantity of the items they donated to Taliban for the construction of *madrasah* or buying of weapons or for other logistic purposes in future.

Multiple reasons were allegedly linked with the tendency of women towards Taliban in Swat. One reason of the inclination of young females was the implementation of

Islamic *pardah* (segregation), which would give them hope to be get rid from the undesired commands (from both male and female) in joint family system.⁵⁶ Another reason of relative popularity of Taliban among lower class was the utopian Islamic emirate which they would claim to be based on equality and fraternity. Some females of lower class would also take interest with a mind to be not deprived from the share in land, for which Fazlullah would occasionally, entice the people.⁵⁷

Social gathering of women on the occasion of conventions and their division into pro and anti Taliban groups was said to be another significant factor for the spreading of Taliban's message across the society. A tiny transgress from the Taliban's code of conduct (of wearing light cloths, make face up or not covering themselves in *burq'h*) would some time lead to heresy and the likely execution of their life.⁵⁸

It was also observed that the Taliban's concept of '*jihad*' and '*shahadat*' (martyrdom) was so readily embraced by some females that when their sons, brothers or other close relatives would die in combat with security forces, instead of mourning, the occasion would be celebrated. Significantly, these occasions would be secretly filmed which would have a 'snowball' effects on the youths.⁵⁹ In some cases sweets

would be distributed and the dead bodies would not be bathed as per Islamic belief. In the environment where mothers, sisters and wives would be seen in satisfied mood rather to be in aggrieved, it would inspire the youth and would upsurge their enthusiasms for martyrdom.⁶⁰

In the formative phase despite the Taliban's manoeuvring of using women for overtly sacred cause they were equally fall prey of their reformatory drives. Women, for being contemplated the exclusive source of obscenity and profanity, were confined to houses,⁶¹ without keeping in view any age limits or job nature. They were threatened and harassed with or without male counterparts for not observing Islamic *pardah* in public spaces or even in private transportation.⁶² Anita M. Weiss narrated the storey of female teachers who were warned that "if we see you not in *burq'ah* in the future, we will cut off your head."⁶³

About a dozen common women including men and also close relatives of Taliban were allegedly shot dead for being involved in 'immoral activities' and even baggers were not let off in that case.⁶⁴ Markets and shops, where women used to go for shopping, were forcibly closed down. Banners were displayed in front of plazas and markets which would explicitly forbade entering of women from buying or dealing common commodities of life. In some cases shopkeepers were reportedly penalised for not abide by the order.⁶⁵ Lady health, polio and NGOs workers

for being western agents to obstruct Islamic identity were forcefully resigned from their jobs.

Wahhabi-Barailvi Encounter

Swat was once a center of Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy and after went through various stages of growth ‘turned into a kind of Mecca [Makkah]’ for Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism and hence the valley became known for ‘legends of spirits and demons, magic and mystery’.⁶⁶ These esoteric doctrines were continued and even the arrival of Muslims in the eleventh century A.D. failed to evade these practices rather ‘Islamisation of esotericism’ evolved through a period of time.⁶⁷ In a spatio-temporal context of Muslims Swat, the practices gained momentum with the arrival of Sufi saints on the Indus borderland in the ‘age of anxiety’ after the Mongol invasion and subsequent re-ordering of entire political order in the context of expanding Muslim states, through the institutionalized cult of *pirs* or saints and the shrines built over their tombs.⁶⁸ Swat has an abundance of shrines (*zyarats*) which believably possessed *kiramah* (miracles) and contained its own peculiar virtues and qualities for benefiting humans. Pir Baba (d.1502 A.D.) and Saidu Baba (d. 1877 A.D.) were the most venerated shrines in the area, and the ‘education of no budding priest of the North-West Frontier is considered complete until he has visited them.’⁶⁹

It was believed that saints enjoyed a closer relationship with God than common devotees, and that the saints' spiritual power and their ability to intercede with God on the devotees' behalf outlasted the saints' mortal lifetime and adhered to their burial places, which became centers of pilgrimage and worship. With the passage of time this faith-based centers, in the valley hostile environment, turned into a 'conflict-free-zone' for religious festivities, political arbitration, economic activities and miraculous healing of various diseases.⁷⁰

Since merger of the Swat State in Pakistan (1969), Wahhabi Islam, mainly embedded through JITS devotees, became at odd with traditional Islam more particularly over the beliefs related to Islamic monotheism. The prevalent social customs of visiting graves and shrines, belief on miracles, amulets, sorcery, incantation, bad omen and evil and such like others centuries-old rituals and practices were challenged in the light of literal interpretation of Quran and Sunnah. How the religious landscape was changed and receded these practices and who played major role, Sultan-i-Rome illustrated the storey as:

Following the Saur Revolution and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the late 1970s; the American, European and Arab involvement; and the Arab funding of the jihadi elements and activities in Afghanistan have also contributed to modifying the religious landscape in Swat. The new Arab influence and the establishment of

madrasahs for propagating and supporting specific school of thoughts (especially of Wahhabism) have drastically changed the outlook of the people.⁷¹

TNSM in its early stage though took all religious sects, irrespective of beliefs, into confidence but once it succeeded to attain popularity of larger segments of the society, its inherited rivalry more particularly with Barailvis over the issue of *tauhid* resurfaced in new form. As the Taliban virtually controlled larger part of Swat in 2007-09, they not only criticized the traditions of curing through incantation, amulets, sorcery or magic spells but even reprimanded the practitioners' polytheists.⁷² Some of them were warned, harassed and few were allegedly beheaded not only in the valley of Swat but in the surrounding areas as well.⁷³ Their vulnerability could be gauged from the local newspapers, in which on daily basis the report of abandoning such professions would be published for mass information. In local Urdu newspaper, *Azadi*, one such story was written as:

Muhammad Sadiq, resident of Mingawara, Swat, hereby confessed that my job is exclusively confined to patients being bite by snakes. With the exception of it sorcery, magic spells and amulets, being an act of idolatry, has nullified. Accordingly all males and females are informed to beware of meeting me in these cases in future.⁷⁴

Being adhered to the literal connotation of monotheism, the Taliban not only forbid child's toys for instance dolls, bears, pictures and such like other stuff which presumably contain souls but confiscated it too in large quantities in the early reformative phase of the movement.⁷⁵ The statues of Budha, which are the historical heritage and pride of the area, were demolished or defaced, with the same mind set.⁷⁶ However, some statements of Fazlullah did not support this proposition as according to him, 'non-Muslims and their religious and archaeological sites should be protected by an Islamic state'.⁷⁷

For being an act of idolatry, visiting tombs and shrines for various miraculous healings were exceedingly prohibited.⁷⁸ In various places mosques and *madaris* related to Barailvi traditions were closed and the *imams* of the concerned mosques were publicly insulted and even forcefully exiled or forbade from publicizing such traditions.⁷⁹ The Taliban issued a religious edict, accordingly: wives of *Ahl-i-Sunnat wal-Jama't* were declared lawful for the Taliban; their properties war booty; turned them heretics and marked for death; and named their place of worships '*masajid-i-zarar*' (mosques of mischief).⁸⁰

With the passage of time Taliban's fanaticism came out in new vigour so much so that some leadership and followers were reportedly beheaded. One such example was that of Pir Samiullah (influential pir among the Gujar tribe) who was brutally

murdered along with his several devotees, in late 2008. His corpse was reportedly dig out from grave and publicly insulted.⁸¹ Later on he was allegedly buried by the Taliban in unknown place for the avowed reason to deprive his devotees of visiting his grave in future for sanctity.⁸²

Likewise, in April 2009, when the Taliban purportedly occupied Bunir; they besieged the shrine of Pir Baba and stopped the devotees visiting the place for pilgrimage. Being a place of sanctity and worship for Barailvis, the Taliban antithetically justified their action by declaring the place a hub of 'idolatry and adultery'.⁸³ Descendants of shrine were forbid of entering the place and alms collectors were inflicted from the area.⁸⁴ Covering and signboards over the grave, for being un-Islamic rituals, were removed.⁸⁵ The disgust and hatred of the Taliban against specific shrines was not confined to Swat or other Taliban infested areas of Malakand division, but was allegedly escalated to other parts of KP as well. The shrine of a Pashto language Sufi poet, Rahman Baba, who was renowned for his love and universal teachings, was also reportedly blown with the same mindset, in Peshawar.⁸⁶

The Taliban hatred against the Barailvi sect allegedly got momentum before and during Rah-i-Rast military operation in late April 2009. Their intolerance against them was so deepen that they allegedly killed some of their leaders and destroyed

their well reputed shrines.⁸⁷ The overt disgust on the part of the Taliban unleashed the religious rampage of Barailvis so much so (which was said to be allegedly backed by military and popular media) that they were purportedly declared *Kharjî*.⁸⁸ They were also marked *baghî* (rebel) for denying the supremacy of onstitution and parliament;⁸⁹ and by declaring Pakistan *dar al-harb* (abode of war); and parliamentarians *murtad* (apostate).⁹⁰

Amid this anti-Pakistan, anti-Islam and anti-humanists rhetoric against the Taliban and the widened trust-deficit between the world community and more exclusively US over the pacification policy of Pakistani state for the Taliban and the apprehension of their expansionism and likely control of atomic assets, Sufi Muhammad oddly declared Fazlullah a *kafir* over the issue of killing ‘co-religionists’⁹¹ and accused him of ‘bringing a bad name to Islam’ and ‘quantum of the loss he inflicted on Islam is much larger than the one done to Islam by non-believers.’⁹² In contrast, it was said to be Sufi Muhammad's slogan—*shari‘ah* or *shahadah* (Islamic laws or martyrdom)—that was picked up by the Taliban to justify their violence.⁹³

Hatred against Democracy

The Taliban are believed to be opponents of political modernity in general and democracy in particular. They reprehend democracy, electoral politics and political parties a Western construct (*kufri*, *taghuti* and *Farangi nizam*) being implemented

upon the oppressed and subjugated peoples of the Muslim world;⁹⁴ and a big barrier for the implementation of *shari'h* laws.⁹⁵

Majority Democracy, according to Sufi Muhammad, is *shirk fi al-hakimiat* (polytheism in sovereignty) meaning that to obey the lordship of man over man, rather than the rule of the one true God. He also equalled democracy with *shirk fi al-eṭa'at* (polytheism in obedience) meaning that it signified on the plurality of parties (which opens up the possibility of non-Islamic parties coming to power), and majoritarianism (since God, not majority's opinion, is the final judge of what is right), which ultimately disagree with submission to God. Pluralism of parties, the Taliban asserted, is tantamount to factionalism and sectarianism, which have been most clearly prohibited in the Quran and Sunnah, as it violate the most emphatic imperative of the unity of the faithful. They excluded believers from the ambit of Islam who adhered to the system what it was called to be the 'pagan system' and would label such practitioners religious bastard (*madhhabi harami*).⁹⁶ As against the Islamists who wanted *shari'h* laws through electoral process or parliament, the Taliban quite contrary sought the objectives through what it was referred to be 'by action; (*bi al-fi'l*).

The heretical politics of the Taliban against individuals and political parties⁹⁷ (secular and religious alike), who believe on western style democracy and electoral politics, came in

intense form, after signing of various ‘peace deals’ between ANP-led provincial government of KP province and Fazlullah’s group, in 2008-2009.⁹⁸ They rejected democracy and the modern state system altogether to the point of labelling the leaders of the two main Islamists factions late Qazi Hussain Ahmad and Fazal-u-Rahman as ‘heretics’ for being proponents of democracy. According to them, to live under *kufri nizam* (infidel system) and not revolting against it, is by itself a *kufri* (infidelity). Having any doubts implies *kufri*, and anyone who is pleased with disbelief is a disbeliever. The punishments meted out to *kufar* are not limited to slaughter; *takfir* (to declare a Muslim as infidel or non-believer) legitimizes the stealing of their money.⁹⁹

Despite distaste for democracy, electoral politics and politicians, the Taliban crusade against specific parliamentarians, local body members and mainstream political parties activists reflected a different and even contradictory picture. Oddly, among all the high and low cadres of politicians, the ruling ANP and PPP were on the hit-list of the Taliban. As the overt military operation prolonged and the ruling parties being a signatories of peace deals resorted to ‘delaying tactics’ for the implementation of *shari‘h* laws, the Taliban also came up with a new strategy. To pressurize ANP-led provincial government, the Taliban forced local counsellors, chairmen’s *zakat* committees and other seats-holders to resign from their chairs.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, some family members of the ruling elites were brutally killed for being aides

to security forces in their longstanding military operation against the Taliban in which the larger victims were the civilian population.¹⁰¹

From the second half of 2008 until signing of agreement in February 2009, the perpetual war between the military and the Taliban created havoc in almost all parts of the valley. The Taliban being in power generally targeted impediments of every sort that would create troubles in the way of their demands and more specifically political and landed elites and elected members of local government.¹⁰² The claim of the Taliban was their alleged contacts with security forces or their avowed opposition to the cause for which they were fighting.¹⁰³

On 25 January 2009, a list of forty three persons including political and landed elites was issued, in which it was ordered to them to be summoned in the court of the Taliban for trials. They were blamed for inviting security forces for launching military operation against the Taliban in Swat; of converting Swat into a heap of gun-powders; and creating big hurdles in the way of implementing *shari'ah* laws.¹⁰⁴ Though many of them for fear of excommunication and security reasons had left Swat well in advance of the common mass migration from the area, and therefore, their movable properties including households, orchards and domesticated animals were ransacked or auctioned for being assumed war's booty, but as anecdotal evidences suggested never they were tried in the courts nor were physically

harmful as the common people would be before, during and after Rah-i-Rast operation. However, subsequent to military operation, some of them were allegedly killed in suicide attacks and some were in target killings.¹⁰⁵

Future Prospects

The Rah-i-Rast operation though in fact displaced millions of people¹⁰⁶ and inflicted a colossal men and material loss of the civil population, but contrary the Taliban's leaderships included Fazlullah allegedly escaped and run away to Afghanistan.¹⁰⁷ Within three months time Swat and adjoining areas of Bunir and Dir were regained and the Taliban's infrastructure was destroyed. In addition their second and third ranked leaderships were reportedly killed in the overt encounters or were detained in various internment centres. Since Fazlullah and his others die hard followers' flight into Afghanistan, they continued their cross border infiltration against NATO and Pakistani forces.¹⁰⁸ Though Fazlullah was purportedly killed in drone attack in June 18, 2018 but the Taliban's resurgence (August 2022) in Swat manifests their strong ideological and strategic linkages in the area of Swat.

Similarly, during the said military operation Sufi Muhammad and other TNSM's activists were reportedly imprisoned after being surrendered or were allegedly killed in the police encounters. The incarcerated leaderships of TNSM were reportedly trailed in Anti-Terrorism Courts (ATC), inside Central

Jail Peshawar under Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), 1997.¹⁰⁹ The TNSM's leadership including Sufi Muhammad was acquitted despite being convicted in hatching conspiracy against the state, murder, sit-in, either for lack of evidences or other legal complications.¹¹⁰

The perpetual ideological war between the Wahhabi and Barailvi, despite the applauded military victory and the reported incessant harping of waning command and control structure of the Taliban, continued to mangle the very social fabric of the Swatis society. The worldwide hype against the recalcitrant nature of the Taliban and more particularly their gruesome actions against the shrines and high seat holders of Barailvis, momentarily offered them political clout over their adversaries. Similarly, the Tahrik Labaik Party (TLP) rising support, more particularly in the peripheries of Swat, is also said to be a reason for the coming back of their confidence. Consequently, they reinvigorated their old traditions of celebrating *milad*, visiting of tombs and shrines and revisiting of old traditions with new zests. In the post-Taliban era, the alleged support of the military men, being ideologically linked with Sufism, and the historical loyalty of the Barailvi sect with the state of Pakistan, also temporarily overshadowed their adversaries.

Under Duha Accord (March, 2020), as the US withdrew from Afghanistan and consequentially the Taliban retrieved the throne of Kabul in August 2021, the entire strategic landscape

once more seemed to be turned in favour of Wahhabism. The shadowy transitory religious frenzies and fantasy of Barailvis seemed to be endangered as the State of Pakistan yet again orientated towards the previous rhetoric of strategic depth policy in Afghanistan through militant groups avowedly linked with Wahhabism.

In the new emerging geo-strategic context, it was commonly assumed that the permanent presence of Pakistani military in the area of Swat and the alleged killing of Fazlullah in drone attack has diminished chances for the Taliban to effectively recapture Swat. It is equally important to note that the prevailing common hatred against the Taliban in Swat and the unprecedented mass awakening movement (*Owlasey Pasun*),¹¹¹ in August 2022 and onwards, indicated their lack of capacity to virtually control the area again and to form a unified and formidable force against their political and ideological rivals. However, the unleash of the JITS since late 2017,¹¹² the acquittal of TNSM and other Taliban's leaderships more particularly after the Afghan's Taliban recapturing of Kabul throne in mid 2021, and the Pakistan's recurring strategic-depth policy, may reinvigorate them to be used for long term political and strategic objectives in the area.

Conclusion

The Taliban being inclined to Wahhabi Islam, during their two years rule in Swat has generally resisted every hindrance in the path of *shari'h* laws but their dreadful action against Barailvi sect and their saintly places of worships, before Rah-i-Rast operation seemed to be premeditated for acquiring popular support than to be an ideological war. Similarly, disgust and intolerance were avowedly shown to relics of Buddhism, however, the asserted defacing of Buddha statues, despite prior warning en route military operation appeared to be an attempt to pave way for the plan at hand. Women being exploited in the formative phase as agents to muster up financial and popular support were instantly victimized; restricted to homes; forbade from getting modern education; and compelled to wear *burqa*; and in some cases brutally killed without taking any preventive criterions as enunciated in the holy Quran and Sunnah. In addition to their professed hatred against political modernity and democracy for being its conflicting nature to Islamic monotheism and a major source of factionalism which ultimately lead to curtail Islamic unity, is a proven fact, but their horrendous action against specific politicians being in power, testified their exclusive antagonism for political purposes than to be carry out an ideological obligation.

The Taliban though ostensibly struggled for the replacement of prevalent judicial system in favour of *shari'h*

laws and in general took on every likely impediments but their particular revolt against women, Barailvi sect and democracy and electoral politics seemed to be an attempt to partly fulfilled an ideological commitment and partly an endeavour on the part of clandestine forces to attain geo-strategic ambitions in the region.

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- ¹ TNSM was a religious movement started in Lower Dir, Timargarah, in June 1989, under the headship of Sufi Muhammad, for the explicit purpose of replacing the incumbent legal regime with *shari'h* laws in the courts of Malakand division. The Swat Valley soon turned out to be its epicentre wherein the movement kept continued its struggle throughout 1990s and compelled the state of Pakistan to capitulate in favour of their demands but avoided to implement it in letter and spirit. The unfulfilled mission of TNSM was restarted by Maulana Fazlullah (the son-in-law of Sufi Muhammad) in late 2004, and after three years struggle took larger segments of the society into confidence and virtually controlled the area and implemented their so-called *shari'h* laws on the people, for details see Gohar Ali, "Talibanisation in Swat: Causes and Effects" (PhD dissertation, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, 2022), 40-150.
- 2 Those who are labelled with the word 'Wahhabi' do not themselves use this term, as it is used as a means of belittlement. They preferred themselves to be called 'muah'idun' or 'tauhidi', see Haneef James Oliver, *The Wahhabi Myth: Dispelling the prevalent Fallacies and the Fictitious Link with Bin Laden* (2002, n.p.), 7.
- 3 Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tauhid*, trans. Abdul Malik Mujahid (Saudi Arabia: Darus-Salam, n.d.), p. 10; for detailed study of Ibn Abdul Wahhab's *Kitab al-Tauhid* critical enquiry see Samira Haj, "Reordering Islamic Orthodoxy: Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Wahhab," *The Muslim World*, 92 (FALL 2002): 339-340.
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- 96 Sultan-i-Rome, "Tahrik Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi and Democracy," 16-17.
- 97 For detailed report about the number of politicians and other notables of Swat for being formally summoned in the court of the Taliban, see *Roznama Azadi Swat* (Urdu daily: Mingawara, Swat), January 26, 2009.
- 98 For detailed contempt of Sufi Muhammad and other TNSM activists, against Western democracy, electoral politics and political parties, see *Roznama Azadi Swat* (Urdu daily: Mingawara, Swat), October 12, 2008; October 15, 2008; October 22, 2008; October 25, 2008; October 29, 2008;
- 99 Personal Communications with teachers and students of GHSS, Dherai, 2015-18.
- 100 Interview with ex-chairman zakath committee, Kanju, Swat, January 10, 2015.
- 101 *Roznama Azadi Swat* (Urdu daily: Mingawara, Swat), August 15, 2008.
- 102 Two naib nazims namely: Zakir Khan and Liaqat Ali, of tahsil Matta, were reportedly killed see *Roznama Azadi Swat* (Urdu daily: Mingawara, Swat), November 26, 2008.
- 103 Personal Communications with ex union council nazim, Kabal, Swat, August 12, 2019.
- 104 Maqbul Arshad, *Main Khud Kash Hamlah Awar Kisi Bana?* (Urdu)(Lahore: Tahir Sons Publishers, 2010), 104-105.
- 105 For details of the wanted list of the peoples, their political and social background, how many of them were killed and what services they offered to security forces and what position they are holding in the current political and social setup of district Swat, see Arshad, *Main Khud Kash Hamlah Awar Kisi Bana?*, 105.
- 106 The recognized number of growing IDPs has turned into a confusing number. Following is the available number: NADRA 1.73 m; SSG 2 m approx; UNHCR/ ERU 2.9 m; UN Secretary General 2.4 m; HRCP 1.783 m. See *Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Weekly Updates*, June 8, 2009.
- 107 For contradictory statements of Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) and Interior Ministry regarding Fazlullah's injury, encirclement, arrest and escape, see *Roznama, Azadi Swat* (Urdu daily: Mingawara, Swat), June 9, 2009; June 11 2009; June 22, 2009; June 23 2009; June 24, 2009; June 27, 2009; July 2, 2009; July 3, 2009; July 10, 2009; for some details that how

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- despite the avowed Rah-i-Rast operation Fazlullah successfully escaped into Afghanistan and the consequent suicide or guerrilla attacks against the political elites, dented the entire efforts of the military, see Arshad, Main Khud Kash Hamlah Awar Kisi Bana? 106.
- 108 David Gartenstein, "A Temporary Marriage of Convenience: Transnational Jihadists in Proxy Warfare," *Fletcher Sec. Rev.*, 41 (2014): 50.
- 109 After the arrest of Sufi Muhammad, the provincial government restored thirteen cases against him that were pending since 1994 and referred them to Anti- Terrorism Courts (ATC). In most cases he was accused of sedition, hatching a conspiracy against the state and hurling threats, see *Daily Dawn*, December 15, 2015; in late 2014, he was reportedly acquitted in ten cases due to lack of evidence under Code of Criminal Procedure (Section 265-K), and referred the remaining three cases to regular courts for being out of scheduled ATC jurisdiction, see Waseem Ahmad Shah, *Daily Dawn*, November 23, 2014.
- 110 For details about Sufi's arrest, trials and the legal lacuna and complication which leads to their acquittal see *Daily Dawn*, (internet edition), November 22, 2011; November 23, 2014; December 15, 2015; April 23, 2015.
- 111 In early August 2022, the Taliban unexpectedly reappeared in Swat which resultantly created fresh wave of unrest among Swatis. Surprisingly, the overwhelming backlash of the local peoples throughout the width and breadth of the Swat Valley did not succeed them to prevail over again, see Fazal Khaliq, "Fresh Wave of Unrest: Swatis Reject Terrorism," *LEEKWAL*, November, 2022, 49-51.
- 112 In October 2017, the JITS, after hibernation of eight years, arranged a gathering of devotees, from all over the country, in the Grassy Ground, Mingawara, Swat, in which Maulana Muhammad Tayyab Tahiri, the current Amir of the seminary, along with some other stalwarts participated. Though, the attempt could not succeed to attract the anticipated quantity of followers, as it has been personally observed, but the zest of the ideologues for the rhetorical shari'h laws in the region and disgust against the Barailvi sect, were awe-inspiring. During speech one of the leaders expressed his hatred in Pukhtu poetical style, meaning that: As the eagle attacks on pigeons in the same passion Panjpiris take down the Barailvis.