



# Educational Resilience to Non-Traditional Security Challenges in Pakistan: A Study of Madrassa Education's Role in Religious Radicalization

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## Abstract

As the primary educational institution in Islamic culture, Madrassas have always been revered in Muslim societies. However, during the 17th-century movements for Islamic reform in the Muslim world, the role of these madrassas expanded from mere educational institutions to become the nurturers of traditional Islamic ideas and responsible for social reforms. In Pakistan, Gen. Zia introduced a drastic change through his Madrassa reforms based on the Sargodha and Halepota reports. Since then, the madrassa curriculum was transformed to follow Islamic law (*Sharia*) strictly, and pushed for the return to the pure Islam that the early Muslims (*Salaf*) followed. Spreading new ideas in religious practices (*bid'a*) was extremely opposed, initiating the politics of exclusion from Islam. This paper analyzes the contents of three books i.e., *Behishti Zevar*, *Qanun-i-Shariat*, and *Fiqh al-Sunnah* taught in some leading religious madrassas in Pakistan, and argues that these teachings are fostering religious radicalization in Pakistan. Instead of countering the non-traditional security challenges through education, the Pakistani state made religious madrassas cradles for religious radicalization.

## Key Words

Madrassa, Religious Radicalization, Non-Traditional Security Challenges

## Introduction

Islamic reformism in South Asia pioneered by Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624), a Naqshbandi Sufi, furthered on the tradition of Shah Wali-Allah (1703–1762) and later Ashraf Ali Thanvi (1863–1943), flourished in the Deobandi School, the Ahl-i ḥadith, the Ahl-i Quran, and the Tablighi Jama'at. It progressed from reformism to Islamism in Maulana Maududi (1903–1979)'s Jama'at-i Islami, with some additions from Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) and his modernist strand. Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) contributed significant insights (Robinson, 2008). Although these scholars' writings impacted Muslims in several fields, the Deobandi School was a trailblazer in the reform of madrassa education. Dar ul-Ulum Deoband was



founded in the United Province in 1867. The Deobandis aimed to prioritize the study of hadith or the recorded teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in contrast to the majority of Indian madrassas of the era, where Islamic rational disciplines like Greek logic and philosophy were valued alongside the study of Islamic law (Zaman, 2007). They still placed a lot of emphasis on Islamic law, but this was also solidly rooted in the hadith and other basic writings of Islam. Furthermore, correcting the beliefs and practices of common believers was a considerably larger part of the madrasa 'ulama's scholastic vocation than it was for any other madrasa. The early Deobandis believed that the best way to be saved and to maintain an Islamic identity in the unfavorable political climate of British colonial rule was to self-consciously adhere to the teachings of the Quran and the hadith, as reflected by the rules of the Hanafi School of law, and to have a sense of personal moral responsibility.

The Deobandis faced competition from other factions, like the Brelvis, had a theological orientation, albeit a far more nebulous one. The Brelvis carried on the traditional forms of devotional piety that are characteristic of Islam in India, under the leadership of Ahmad Raza Khan Brelvi (d. 1921), a distinguished scholar (Sanyal, 2005). These included holding frequently ornate ceremonies in honor of the Prophet Muhammad, particularly to commemorate his birthday (*milad*), and honoring Muslim saints, usually on their death anniversaries at their shrines. Their devotional piety has long been rooted in the belief that the spirit of the Prophet is still present among them, particularly during events held in his honor. The Brelvis believed that the best way to have God answer one's prayers was to secure the intercession of the saint and, of course, of the Prophet. The Deobandis also held the memory of the Prophet and the saints in high regard, but there was considerable disagreement even among them on whether or not to take part in the widespread ceremonial events held in the Prophet's honor. However, they tended to be wary of overt displays of devotion to holy persons because they believed it was threatening to what should be an unwavering commitment to God. The more strict Deobandis were not above labeling specific devotional acts as polytheism, and they believed that the Sufi piety that was characteristic of Brelvi traditions strayed dangerously near to making partners with God, the most grievous of sins in Islam. For their side, the Brelvis frequently referred to the Deobandis as Wahabis because of the sectarian beliefs of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab (d. 1791), in Arabia, which was notorious for its opposition to the worship of Muslim holy figures. Wahabi was also associated with fanaticism, a strong dislike of the British, and subversiveness in early colonial India; these associations were hardly accidental in Brelvi usage.

It is difficult to gauge how Deobandi and Brelvi doctrines have affected the lives of regular believers. Nonetheless, none of Deobandi's competitors have been able to match the rise in the number of madrassas founded by people who were somewhat devoted to their teachings. Thousands more Deobandi madrassas were progressively built across the Indian subcontinent, starting with a madrasa at Saharanpur, also in the United Provinces, six months after Dar ul-Ulum Deoband was founded. Although they all claim to share the doctrinal orientation exemplified by the first madrasa at Deoband, they have had little official relationship with one

another. Pakistan saw the establishment of numerous new madrassas following the 1947 division of the Indian subcontinent. One estimate in 2002 suggests the number of registered madrassas in Pakistan is around 10,000, with many more unregistered, and at least 7,000 registered madrassas had Deobandi tendency (Rahman, 2004).

### 1.1. Madrassas in Pakistan

In Pakistan, there are two basic sectors in education: the madrassa education and the public/private commercial education. Unfortunately, the government persistently failed to register the madrassas, as all the public/private schools are registered and regulated by the education boards. This failure causes the inadequate education and loose administrative structure of the madrassa sector. Since 1983-4, it was made compulsory for the madrassas to affiliate with one of the five waqf boards to create an institutional curriculum, conduct exams, award *asnad* (degrees), and further the political objectives of their schools. These boards are structured strictly along denominational lines and are under the jurisdiction of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) (Riaz, 2008). Due in part to the fact that many madrassas continue to operate informally and without registration, the exact number of madrassas in Pakistan remains unknown. According to the 2017–18 Pakistan Education Statistics study, there are 31,115 madrassas in the country, housing 4.099 million students and employing 0.179 million teachers (Tahir, 2022). The deficiencies of our public school system and the lack of schools in the rural areas, and Afghan immigrants, who are frequently shut out of the formal educational system, are some of the factors contributing to the madrassa sector's expansion (Hunter, 2020). These institutions' provision of free education, including boarding and housing, is another important aspect that has led to their perception as necessary educational institutions for the underprivileged (Tahir, 2022). Despite the dearth of research on madrassa enrollment, recent survey data show that parents enroll their children in madrassas mostly due to financial difficulties, away from a choice for religious education (Salahuddin, 2018).

Most of the Pakistani madrassas provide an eight to sixteen-year program that is split into six phases, however, certain schools offer an advanced post-graduate level of education. Urdu is typically used as the primary language of instruction in Pakistani madrassas, however, many also use regional languages like Sindhi and Pashto. Arabic and Persian are given particular attention. The madrassas often use a version of the 18th-century curriculum known as Dars-i-Nizami, which mostly consists of medieval and traditional Islamic writings. The roughly twenty subjects offered in the Dars-i-Nizami can be divided into two main groups: the *maqulat* (the rational sciences) and the *manqulat* (the transmitted/revealed sciences). Madrassa instructors frequently hold the '*alim* (higher secondary) or *faazil* (Bachelor of Arts) madrassa degrees, despite their lack of professional pedagogical skills.

### 1.2. Madrassa Reforms in Pakistan

Madrassa reforms have taken place in three stages since Pakistan's creation: in 1962 under the Ayub administration, in 1979 under the Zia regime, and in 2001 under the Musharraf government. These three reform initiatives were intricate and multidimensional, and their

objectives and paths were greatly influenced by regional political considerations. The first is that military authorities, who had a political stake in justifying their authority, launched these three concerted attempts to restructure the madrassa sector. Second, the question of Islamic education is highly politicized since Pakistan's justification as a sovereign nation-state is closely linked to how Islam and Muslim identity are interpreted. The fact that the government did not always design, launch, and carry out these reforms with the ulema's approval and engagement made them controversial as well.

One year after Gen. Ayub's military coup, the madrassa reform movement started in 1959 amid a contentious debate about the relation between Islam and politics. The two main goals of the movement were to reform the madrassa curriculum and to scrutinize the funding sources of madrassas. The first aim was fulfilled when Islamic endowments, or *auqaf*, were nationalized in 1960. By forcing vitality, it had the immediate impact of enfeebling madrassas, allowing for the implementation of the second reform objective, which involved changing their curricula (Riaz, 2008). A committee was formed in 1961 to review the current curricula employed by madrassas and offer suggestions on how to prepare their pupils to satisfy employers' requirements (Riaz, 2008). Of its eleven members, two were government employees, six were university scholars, and three belonged to madrassas. It was funded by the Asia Foundation, a non-profit organization based in the United States, and it encompassed over 700 madrassas that taught the Dars-i Nizami curriculum (Swabi, 2012). The committee's 1962 report included a number of recommendations, such as adding new topics including sports, social sciences, and mathematics, and replacing pointless non-religious subjects with ones derived from reliable sources of information. It is interesting to note that the reform suggestions were limited to non-religious subjects.

Expanding the syllabus to fifteen years education with mandatory five year primary education, division of the new structure into five stages, teaching secondary students in Arabic and English and Primary students in Urdu, introducing mathematics, adding examinations at the highest level in hadith, astronomy, and mathematics, and excluding logic and philosophy because they were thought to be irrelevant for the study of religion were among the specific suggestions made in the report. Furthermore, the establishment of a directorate of religious instruction was intended to oversee madrassas, namely the performance of both teachers and pupils. Additionally, the committee recommended that instructors be given specialized six-month training in the new disciplines (Swabi, 2012). The ulema naturally objected to Gen. Ayub Khan's reform initiative since they saw it as an attempt to colonize Islam (Rahman, 1999). The bulk of prominent ulema rejected these curriculum reform suggestions, which did not succeed.

The second phase of madrassa reforms was initiated during Gen. Zia's military regime under the idea of Islamization in Pakistan. In 1978, a trial study was conducted about the madrassas of Sargodha, and its report was the preamble of the Halepota report, another study directed by Dr. A. W. J. Halepota. Dr. Halepota was also responsible for the 1962 report. Since madrassa education was not preparing students for the demands of the modern world and jobs, especially

in the public sector, both reforms shared the fundamental objective of integrating madrassas with the nation's entire educational system (Riaz, 2008). After discovering little consistency in the curricula and examination system, it recommended incorporating the madrassas into the conventional education system. Although ulema were not included in the committee, it was stated that, in contrast to the 1962 report, it held extensive conversations with the ulema before developing the final recommendations. Additionally, it provided the madrassas with unrestricted government funding for both operational and infrastructure improvements. Additionally, the government pledged to increase madrassa graduates' work opportunities, particularly in the government sector.

The establishment of a National Institute of Madrassas was proposed to regulate madrassas and their curriculum. This institute was established to guarantee the government's equal representation. Additionally, it was suggested that madrassa certifications be equivalent to the formal education system at all levels, from primary to master's (Swabi, 2012). Despite the apparent compromises made to accommodate madrassas, this second round of curriculum revisions again fell short of its goals. All the madrassas rejected these recommendations, taking them as an invasion of their institutional sanctity (Swabi, 2012). In subsequent years, some madrassas did adhere to some guidelines to obtain the promised cash, but experts argue that this was an arrangement between the madrassas and the government (Riaz, 2008). During the Afghan Jihad, the Pakistani government put on hold all the reforms because of the need for madrassas to promote a certain ideology.

Another military leader, Gen. Musharraf, implemented the third significant set of reforms. These were implemented in three phases, and the conditions that led to their implementation imply the presence of neocolonialist forces. After Musharraf took office in 1999, he issued the Pakistan Madrassa Education Board Ordinance in 2001. It was intended to oversee madrassas and integrate them into the formal education system by adding subjects like English, Mathematics, Computer Science, Economics, Political Science, Law, and Pakistan Studies. However, before the implementation of this ordinance, the incident of 9/11 happened, and Pakistan, under intense international pressure, introduced the Madrassa Registration Ordinance 2002. This decree, which required all madrassas to register with the Pakistan Madrassa Education Board and provincial boards or face fines or forced closure, was more concerned with madrassa control than curricular reform. The admission of international students and foreign funding was also banned. Regarding curriculum reform, it pledged financial support to madrassas that taught science, math, English, and Urdu.

The US pressure caused the government to shift its position on the changes; the ordinance's provisions were far more stringent and restrictive than those of the PME Ordinance 2001 (International Crisis Group, 2002). Although Gen. Musharraf made it clear that "we do not aim to bring madrassas under the 2001 reforms," the alleged purpose of the reforms was to create the model madrassas without compromising the sector's freedom and autonomy (Muhammad et al., 2011). This is exactly what the 2002 ordinance sought to accomplish. The military



government of Pervez Musharraf and the United States agreed that madrassas in Pakistan were the main source of militancy and terrorism both domestically and internationally, and they should be reformed, controlled, or even destroyed and made illegal if necessary (Naseem, 2009). In 2002, an agreement was signed between the USAID and Pakistan that the former would finance around \$100 million to increase the quality of education in Pakistan (Kronstandt, 2004). The European media maintained a high level of public awareness on the regulation of madrassas. The major portion of the US aid was invested in madrassa education due to persistent pressure from the US (Naseem, 2009).

When the Musharraf government implemented a third phase of changes in mid-2002, the curriculum once again became the main focus. The restructuring of the syllabus was an effort to bring the madrassa sector into line with the formal education system, and the Ministry of Education supplied the teaching resources and assistance. To make this possible, the government provided incentives in the form of teacher training, a one-time grant to equip buildings and libraries, and the cost of computer equipment and infrastructure. To support this modernization plan, it was also prepared to communicate with the ulema (Riaz, 2008). These measures, like their predecessors, were met with strong opposition. In order to defend their autonomy in running the madrassas and choosing the curriculum, the ulema established an organization known as the Ittehad-i Tanzimat-ul Madaris-i Deenia (ITTD) as early as the initial stage of reform. Additionally, pressure from other countries, particularly the United States, only served to stoke the flames. This was seen by the ulema and certain civil society groups as a Western hegemonic endeavor (Fair, 2009). Only 1200 madrassas had registered by the end of 2002, and the majority of them declined to accept the curriculum change or reveal their funding sources. There was minimal advancement in the madrassa sector, and the character and extent of the reforms continued to be contentious (Riaz, 2008).

Since then, Pakistani madrassas have come under growing criticism for encouraging Islamic radicalism. Critics contend that these organizations have frequently assisted in fostering extremist beliefs, adding to the nation's larger security issues, rather than providing a forum for nonviolent religious expression. This paper focuses on analyzing the curriculum taught in certain madrassas, specifically examining three texts: *Behishti Zavar* (Paradise of Women) by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (d. 1943), *Qanun-i-Shariat* (Law of Sharia) by Qazi Shamsuddin Ahmad Jafari (d.1989), and *Fiqh al-Sunnah* (Jurisprudence of Sunnah) by Shaikh Syed Sabiq (d. 2000), arguing that the contents of such texts play a central role in propagating extremist ideologies that contribute to the growing threat of radicalization in Pakistan.

### 1.3. *Behishti Zavar*

*Behishti Zavar* was written by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (1863-1943) in 1909. Maulana Thanvi was among the most repudiated Sunni Muslim scholars of his time in colonial India, who wrote thousands of scholarly articles and several books. The two most famous of his books are *Behishti Zavar* and *Bayan-ul Quran*. He graduated from Dar ul-Uloom Deoband in 1883, and later pursued his career as a scholar at *Khanqah-i Imdadiyah* in Kanpur and Thana Bhawan.

He taught Sufism, Hadith, *Fiqh*, and the Quran, and his teachings combined Islamic ideology, Sunni orthodoxy, and the patriarchal social order. *Behishti Zavar*, the book under consideration, is a thorough manual of *fiqh*, Islamic customs, and ethics that is particularly intended for women's and girls' education. The five pillars of Islam are explained in the book, along with several lesser-known ideas. It covers a wide range of subjects in its eleven sections, including how to interact politely with elders, true stories, beliefs, cleanliness, the fundamental tenets of Islam, social values, money matters, un-Islamic customs, worship manners, tales of devout women, illnesses and remedies, recipes, and descriptions of Islamic worships. Since its release, practically every Sunni family has regarded this book as a must-read, and it is included in the curricula of all Sunni madrassas, particularly those for women.

#### 1.4. *Qanun-i Shariat*

The book *Qanun-i Shariat* is written by Maulana Shamsuddin Ahmad (1905-1989). Maulana got his early education from Jamea Naeemia Muradabad. After completing his education, he started teaching in *Dar-ul Ulum Manzar-i Islam Barili*, *Jamea Naeemia Muradabad*, and some other madrassas. He also served as the head of *Jamea Rizvia Hamidia Banaras* and *Jamea Ashrafia Mubarakpur*, *Azamgarh*, and taught *tafsir-i Quran*, Hadith, and *fiqh*. Some of his famous works include *Qawaed-u Nazar*, *Qawaed-ul Aerab*, *Kashkol-i Jafari*, and *Qanun-i Shariat* (two volumes). *Qanun-i Shariat* is primarily a book about Islam's religious beliefs, including pilgrimage, weddings, divorce, financial matters, and other affairs of daily life. Instead of chapters, it is divided into topic-wise headings including, destiny, prophets, miracles, death, Day of Judgment, caliphate, ablution, bath, menstruation, call for prayer, prayer, reading of Quran, picture making, ethics for masjid visitation, funeral, fasting, alms, and sacrifice etc.

#### 1.5. *Fiqh al-Sunnah*

One of the most well-known and extensively read Islamic texts in the world today is *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, written by Syed Sabiq (1915–2000), an Egyptian scholar who made a significant contribution to the subject of *fiqh* studies. After earning his degree from al-Azhar's Faculty of *Shari'a* in 1947, he pursued further education. Thereafter, he held a number of positions at organizations connected to al-Azhar before relocating to Saudi Arabia to teach at Umm al-Qura University in Makkah and Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah. During his long academic career, he authored several research articles and supervised scholarly dissertations. He was acknowledged for his services by the Egyptian government in 1992, with the Medal of Honor, and by the Saudi government in 1994, with the King Faisal Prize for Islamic Studies. His most famous work is his book *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, which consists of five volumes and has been translated into several languages. *Fiqh al-Sunnah* comprises five volumes, *Fiqh al-Sunnah: Purification and Prayer*; *Fiqh al-Sunnah: Supererogatory Prayer*; *Fiqh al-Sunnah: Alms Tax and Fasting*; *Fiqh al-Sunnah: Funerals and Dhikr*; *Fiqh al-Sunnah: Hajj and Umrah*.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Religious radicalization in Pakistan is significantly growing as a non-traditional security challenge, making the national stability vulnerable. The traditional role of madrassas was

religious instruction, but their gradual transformation since the colonial period made them vital for social stability. Their education system, focused on the exclusive interpretation of Islam, was the result of the ideological shifts since the colonial period, expedited in the Gen. Zia regime, raising serious concerns about their role in religious radicalization. The madrassa reforms introduced by Gen. Zia and later Gen. Musharraf did nothing but intensify religious fragmentation endorsed by these madrassas. This research aims to analyze the madrassa syllabus, focusing on three popular texts commonly taught in most Sunni madrassas: *Behishti Zevar*, *Qanun-i Shariat*, and *Fiqh al-Sunnah*.

### 3. Research Objective

- The central objective of this study is to highlight the shallowness of government efforts to reform madrassas, specifically the reforms introduced by the military governments of Gen. Zia and Gen. Musharraf. Both tried to restructure the madrassa syllabus but failed. Instead, Gen. Zia's period is marked with increased sectarianism along with exponential growth in religious radicalization.
- Another aim of this study is to demonstrate the narrative built by madrassas about certain issues like blasphemy, *fatiha*, shrine visitation, and other rituals. Unfortunately, these issues are usually the key points of every sectarian conflict or mob violence in Pakistan.
- The paper highlights the out-datedness of the debates and discussions being taught in madrassas. There's no attention to meet the emerging global challenges, despite all the focus on going back to the tradition developed 1400 years ago.
- And lastly, the research is an effort to suggest some policy for the future reform efforts by the Pakistani government.

### 4. Literature Review

Scholars from a range of backgrounds have extensively researched the problem of radicalization based in madrassas. Important studies have examined how madrassa education affects society and politics, how it contributes to sectarian strife, and how a certain kind of syllabus encourages religious fanaticism. According to Muhammad Waseem (2010), Pakistan's failure to resolve sectarian tensions has resulted in the emergence of "negative peace," in which the dynamics of conflict are hidden behind the surface of stability. Waseem stresses that efforts to promote peace will be futile if sectarian and intra-religious conflicts are not addressed. The intricacies of Islamic education are examined by Metcalf (1982), Grandin and Gaborieau (1997), Robinson (2001), Zaman (2002), and Hartung and Reifeld (2006). They point out that class, gender, and sect are some of the elements that influence the structure and substance of religious instruction, which adds to the diversity and occasionally polarizing nature of madrassa teachings. The importance of madrassas in fostering sectarian conflict is highlighted by Saleem H. Ali (2007), who points out that many madrassas place a great emphasis on their religious viewpoint, which frequently results in violent conflict with competing Muslim organizations. The texts and academics that predominate in madrassa curricula are criticized by Tariq Rahman (2007), who contends that they are out of date with current issues. Rahman contends that pupils



become disengaged from the outside world and more vulnerable to extreme views when they don't connect with modernity and global issues. According to Masooda Bano (2007), many madrassas generate people with discriminatory ideas, even though only a small percentage of them encourage militancy. A larger culture of intolerance is exacerbated by the exclusion of other sects and views within madrassas. Izza Tahir (2022) argues that any significant curriculum reform should prioritize diversity and address the underlying reasons of radicalization rather than only focusing on surface-level reforms, and she supports decolonizing the reform initiatives currently taking place in Pakistan.

## 5. Research Methodology

To investigate the contents of *Behishti Zavar*, *Qanun-i-Shariat*, and *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, this study uses a textual analysis methodology. Both external criticism, the sociopolitical and historical environment in which these works are taught, and their impact on students, and internal criticism, the content and interpretation of the texts themselves, form the basis of the examination. This is an inductive study of the role of madrassas in spreading religious radicalization in Pakistan through qualitative analysis.

## 6. Findings

Several concerning problems that fuel religious radicalism are shown by examining some excerpts from *Behishti Zavar*, *Qanun-i-Shariat*, and *Fiqh al-Sunnah*.

### 6.1. Blasphemy:

Blasphemy is one of the most crucial issues that Pakistani society is facing these days, with thousands of cases registered against blasphemy allegations, and at least 89 people killed by violent mobs. This frightening scenario is the result of rapidly radicalizing Pakistani society. Since 1986, an addition was made in section 295 of the Pakistan Penal Code, through the Criminal Law Amendment Act, mandating the death penalty or life imprisonment for insulting Islam, Quran, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his companions, or his wives. In this legal context, it is interesting to analyze blasphemy according to the books taught in Pakistani madrassas. Following is an excerpt from *Behishti Zavar* (Thanvi, 1909) explaining blasphemy.

کفر و شرک کی باتوں کا بیان

کسی بزرگ یا پیر کے ساتھ یہ عقیدہ رکھنا کہ ہمارے سب حال کی اسکو ہر وقت ضرور خبر رہتی ہے۔  
کسی کو دور سے پکارنا اور یہ سمجھنا کہ اسکو خبر ہوگی، کسی کو نفع نقصان کا مختار سمجھنا، کسی سے مرادیں مانگنا، روزی اور اولاد مانگنا، کسی کے نام کا روزہ رکھنا، کسی کو سجدہ کرنا، کسی کے نام کا جانور چھوڑنا یا چڑھاوا چڑھانا، کسی کے نام کی منت ماننا، کسی قبر یا مکان کا طواف کرنا، خدا کی حکم کی مقابلہ میں کسی دوسری بات یا رسم کو مقدم رکھنا، کسی کے سامنے جھکنا۔  
علی بخش، حسین بخش، عبدالنبی وغیرہ نام رکھنا، کسی بزرگ کا نام بطور وظیفہ کے چپنا، یوں کہنا کہ خدا اور رسول اگر چاہے گا تو فلاں کام ہو جاوے گا، کسی کے نام یا سر کی قسم کھانا، جاندار کی بڑی تصویر رکھنا، خصوصاً کسی بزرگ کی تصویر برکت کے لئے رکھنا اور اسکی تعظیم کرنا۔

**Translation**

**Explaining the Blasphemous Contents:** Believing in a saint, he always knows everything about us, imploring to someone far away and believing that he will listen, considering someone responsible for our benefit and loss, praying for children or wealth at a shrine, fasting, pledging or bowing for someone, freeing animal at someone's name or covering a grave with a cloth, revolving around a grave or shrine, preferring any ritual above God's law, naming as Ali Bakhsh, Husayn Bakhsh, Abdul Nabi, etc. reciting the name of a saint, saying that if Allah and Prophet willed it will happen, swearing at someone, keeping a large picture of any living being, especially of a saint for blessings and respecting it.

Next excerpts, about the similar issue, are from *Qanun-i-Shariat* (Ahmad, 2015), describing beliefs about caliphs, companions of the prophet (PBUH), and his family.

عقیدہ: افضل غلیفہ کون ہے؟: انبیاء و مرسلین کے بعد تمام مخلوقات الہی جن و انس و ملک سے افضل صدیق اکبر ہیں، پھر عمر فاروق پھر عثمان غنی پھر مولیٰ علی، جو شخص حضرت مولا علی کو حضرت صدیق اکبر یا عمر فاروق سے افضل بتائے وہ گمراہ بد مذہب ہے  
عقیدہ: صحابی کی توہین کا حکم: کسی صحابی کے ساتھ بد عقیدگی گمراہی و بد مذہبی ہے، حضرت امیر معاویہ، حضرت عمرو بن عاص، حضرت وحشی وغیرہ کسی صحابی کی شان میں بے ادبی تبرائے اور اس کا قائل رافضی۔

حضرت معاویہ کو برا کہنے والے کا حکم: عقیدہ: کوئی ولی کتنے ہی بڑے مرتبہ کا ہو کسی صحابی کے رتبہ کو نہیں پہنچتا۔ حضرت علی سے حضرت امیر معاویہ کی جنگ خطائے اجتہادی ہے جو گناہ نہیں، اس لیے حضرت معاویہ کو ظالم، باغی، سرکش یا کوئی برا کلمہ کہنا حرام و ناجائز بلکہ تبر اور فض ہے۔

عقیدہ: حضرت امام حسین کو باغی کہنے والے کا حکم: جو حضرت امام حسین کو باغی کہے یا یزید کو حق پر بتائے وہ مردود و خارجی مستحق جہنم ہے۔ یزید کے ناحق پر ہونے میں کیا شبہ ہے، البتہ یزید کو کافر نہ کہیں اور نہ مسلمان کہیں بلکہ سکوت کریں۔

عقیدہ: اختلافات صحابہ کا حکم: جو صحابہ و اہل بیت سے محبت نہ رکھے وہ گمراہ و بد مذہب ہے۔ صحابہ کرام میں آپس میں جو واقعات ہوئے ان میں پڑنا حرام و سخت حرام ہے۔ ان کی لغزشات پر گرفت کرنا یا ان کی وجہ سے ان پر طعن یا ان سے بد اعتقادی ناجائز، اللہ اور رسول کے حکم کے خلاف ہے

**Translation**

**Belief: Who is the superior caliph?** After the prophets, among all the heavenly and worldly creatures, Abu Bakr Siddique is the superior, followed by Umar Farooq, then Usman Ghani, and lastly Maula Ali. Anyone who claims Maula Ali superior to Hazrat Siddique Akbar or Umar Farooq is misguided or a disbeliever.

**Belief: Command about the blasphemy against the Prophet's Companions:** Disbelieving any of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s companions is heresy and misguidedness. Disrespecting any companion like Hazrat Amir Muawiyah, Hazrat Amr bin 'Aas, Hazrat Wahshi, etc. is *tabara* (cursing) and that person will be considered *Rafizi* (rejector).

**Command about cursing Hazrat Amir Muawiya:** Belief: Any *wali* (saint), no matter what status, can't be equal to a Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s companion. The war between Hazrat Ali and Hazrat Amir Muawiya was an intellectual misjudgment, which is not a sin. Therefore, considering Hazrat Amir Muawiya a tyrant, rebel, stubborn, or saying any other bad words is *tabar* and *rafz*.

**Belief: Command about calling Imam Husayn a rebel:** Anyone calling Hazrat Imam Husayn a rebel and Yazid on the right path is *mardud* (rejected) and *kharji* (excluded), and deserves hell. There's no doubt on Yazid being wrong, but do not call him *kafir* (disbeliever) or Muslim, keep silence.

**Belief: Command about controversies between the companions:** Anyone who does not have love for the companions is heresy and misguided. Judging the incidents between the companions is extremely forbidden. Questioning their mistakes, accusing or disrespecting them is a violation of Allah and His Prophet's commands.

Blasphemy against God, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and his companions is punishable by severe penalties, according to the texts. These teachings may be seen as encouraging religious fervor, but they also foster a strict, uncompromising interpretation of religious orthodoxy that offers little opportunity for discussion or compromise. These interpretations have the potential to create an atmosphere of fear and intolerance by stigmatizing and punishing those who are accused of blasphemy.

6.2. **Religious Rituals:** Texts like *Qanun-i-Shariat* and *Fiqh al-Sunnah* take a strict stance on religious rituals, discouraging certain forms of worship, such as the celebration of *milad* (the Prophet's birthday) or the veneration of saints through practices like visiting shrines. These teachings can foster sectarian tensions, particularly between different Islamic groups with differing practices. Such divisive teachings often lead to a perception that certain Islamic practices are "un-Islamic," further marginalizing different sects and religious groups. Following is an excerpt from *Qanun-i-Shariat* condemning certain religious rituals.

#### فاتحہ کا بیان

پھر جمعرات کی قید اپنی طرف سے لگالی، جب شریعت سے سب دن برابر ہیں تو خاص جمعرات ہی کو فاتحہ کا دن سمجھنا، شرعی حکم کو بدلنا ہے یا نہیں؟ پھر اس قید سے ایک خرابی پیدا ہو گئی ہے کہ لوگ یہ سمجھنے لگے ہیں کہ مردوں کی روحیں جمعرات کو اپنے اپنے گھر آتی ہیں اگر کچھ ثواب مل گیا تو خیر نہیں تو خالی ہاتھ لوٹ جاتی ہیں، یہ محض غلط خیال ہے اور بلا دلیل ایسا عقیدہ رکھنا گناہ ہے، اسی طرح کوئی تاریخ مقرر کرنا اور یہ سمجھنا کہ اس میں زیادہ ثواب ملے گا محض گناہ کا عقیدہ ہے۔

#### Translation

##### Explaining Fatiha (Reciting some Quranic verses for the deceased)

Wrongly, they have fixed Thursday, while all days are equal in *Shari'a* law; therefore, considering Thursday specifically as the day for *fatiha* is changing the *Shari'a* law. This led to another misconception that the spirits of the deceased visit their houses every Thursday; it's

better if they find some blessing, or they will return empty-handed. It's mere disbelief and is a sheer sin. Likewise, fixing a date and thinking it more blessed is just a sinful belief.

Reciting the *fatiha* is almost the practice of every other Sunni-Barelvi household in the subcontinent, and claiming it as a disbelief and sin is marginalizing a larger part of the population. This rigid approach leads to the radicalization of society.

6.3. **Shrine Rituals:** The texts under review also criticize the practices associated with visiting shrines and making vows (*mannat*). This focus on prohibiting "innovations" in religious practice can alienate large segments of the population, particularly those in rural areas who have traditionally participated in these rituals. Such teachings can contribute to an atmosphere of religious puritanism that isolates individuals from mainstream religious practices and fosters a sense of superiority over others. The excerpt below is taken from *Qanun-i-Shariat*.

بزرگوں اور اولیاء اللہ کے فاتحہ میں ایک اور خرابی ہے وہ یہ کہ لوگ اُن کو حاجت روا اور مشکل کشا سمجھ کر اس نیت سے فاتحہ و نیاز دلاتے ہیں کہ اُن سے ہمارے کام نکلیں گے، حاجتیں پوری ہوں گی اولاد ہوگی مال اور رزق بڑھے گا، اولاد کی عمر بڑھے گی۔ ہر مسلمان جانتا ہے کہ اس طرح کا عقیدہ صاف شرک ہے، خدا بچائے۔ غرض ان سب رسموں اور عادتوں کو بالکل چھوڑ دینا چاہیئے، جیسا ہم نے اوپر بیان کیا ہے اور ان سب لغویات کو چھوڑ دینا چاہیئے بس بلا پابندی رواج جو کچھ توفیق اور میسر ہو پہلے محتاج کو دے دو پھر اس کا ثواب بخش دو ہمارے اس بیان سے گیارہویں، سہ منی، توشہ وغیرہ سب کا حکم نکل آیا اور سمجھ میں آگیا ہوگا۔ بعض لوگ قبروں پر چڑھاوا چھڑھاتے ہیں یہ تو بالکل حرام ہے اور اس چڑھاوے کا کھانا بھی درست نہیں۔ نہ خود کھاؤ نہ کسی کو دو کیونکہ جس کا کھانا درست نہیں، دینا بھی درست نہیں۔ بعض آدمی مزاروں پر چادریں اور غلاف بھیجتے ہیں اور اسکی منت ماننے ہیں، چادر چڑھانا منع ہے اور جس عقیدے سے لوگ ایسا کرتے ہیں وہ شرک ہے۔

### Translation

There's another problem in reciting the *fatiha* for the Sufis and saints, people consider them problem-solvers and wish-givers. They recite their *fatiha* with the hope that they will solve their issues, grant wishes, increase their number of children, wealth, and prolong their children's age. Every Muslim knows that all these beliefs are pure *shirk* (equating someone with Allah), God forbid. All these habits and rituals should be abandoned completely. Whatever your status allows you, firstly donate to the needy, and then dedicate the blessings to the deceased. With all these explanations, we have clarified misconceptions about gayarhvien (11<sup>th</sup> day of every lunar month), *seh manni* (feeding someone for three months), etc. Some people cover the graves with cloths, which is strictly forbidden; eating food for this donation is also wrong. Do not eat or let anyone eat. Some people vow at the shrines and then send cloths for the graves; this is *shirk*. Another excerpt from *Fiqh al-Sunnah* also addresses the same issue in the following words.

قبروں پر چادریں چڑھانے سے ممانعت  
یہ حلال نہیں، کیونکہ یہ غرض شرعی کے غیر میں مال کا صرف کرنا اور بلا فائدہ فعل ہے۔  
قبر پر چادر اُغرنے اور مساجد بنانے کی نہیں

قبروں پر چراغ جلانا اور مساجد بنانا جائز نہیں، اس میں بلا فائدہ مال کا ضیاع ہے اور قبروں کی تعظیم میں افراط ہے جو بتوں کی تعظیم سے مشابہ ہے۔ سیدہ عائشہ کہتی ہیں کہ نبی کریم کی قبر کو اس لیے نمایاں نہیں کیا گیا کہ کہیں لوگ اسے مسجد نہ بنالیں (یعنی اس کے آس پاس نمازیں پڑھنا شروع کریں) اور اس لیے کہ قبروں کی نماز کے ساتھ تخصیص بتوں کی تعظیم اور ان کے تقرب سے مشابہت ہوگی اور ذکر ہوا کہ بت پرستی کی ابتدا قبور کے پاس نمازیں پڑھنے اور انکو برکت کے لیے چھونے سے ہوئی تھی۔

### Translation

**Prohibiting Clothing the Graves:** It's not *halal* (permissible), because it is investing money for something against *shari'a*, and is a useless act.

**Banning lightning at the Graves and Building Mosques:** It is not allowed to light lamps and construct mosques at the graves. It is simply the waste of money, and regarding graves as sacred is similar to idolatry. Syeda Ayesha narrated that Prophet Muhammad PBUH's grave was not made prominent, just because people would make it a place of worship (mosque). Therefore, worshiping around the graves will reflect like respecting idols, because the beginning of idolatry was worshiping around the graves and touching them for blessings.

Shrine visitation and rituals are a very strong part of South Asian culture; poor, needy, and sick people often visit shrines for free food, shelter, or blessings of the buried saint. The discussion in the above-mentioned texts promotes hatred for these people and marginalizes their existence, leading to justifying the suicide attacks on these Sufi shrines in Pakistan.

### 7. Suggestions

In Pakistan, blasphemy and shrine rituals are the most controversial issues, often resulting in sectarian violence, mob attacks, and suicide attacks. Unfortunately, the above texts do not promote tolerance, coexistence, harmony, and acceptance; instead, narrow-minded and strict interpretations of *Shari'a*, and non-acceptance of diversity have transformed these madrassas into the factories of religious radicalization. Religious radicalization is a major non-traditional security challenge in Pakistan, and madrassas—especially those that teach books like *Behishti Zevar*, *Qanun-i-Shariat*, and *Fiqh al-Sunnah*—continue to contribute to the spread of extremism. To solve these problems and advance a more accepting and tolerant society, this study emphasizes the possibility of reforming madrassas.

- To combat radicalization, the madrassa curriculum must be completely redesigned with an emphasis on fostering the virtues of peace, cohabitation, and tolerance. It is obvious that any reform initiatives must address the fundamental problems with the religious education curriculum rather than just making surface-level adjustments.
- Madrassas can evolve into powerful institutions for social advancement and peacemaking by adopting a curriculum that promotes critical thinking, understanding of diverse religious traditions, and respect for social diversity. To transform the madrassa system from a source of conflict to a forum for societal cohesion and unity, the Pakistani government, civic society, and religious scholars must collaborate.
- Madrassas should not be associated with any sect, instead, their syllabus should comprise books from the scholars of all the major sects of Islam, allowing students to interpret it at their own.



- The subjects like philosophy, logic, and linguistics should be compulsory for all the madrassas, reviving the pre-colonial spirit of Islamic education.

The major reason for children opting for madrasa education is poverty; they cannot afford formal education, while madrassas provide them with residence, food, and education. Therefore, the driving force to learn religious education is not passion for it, but hunger, resulting in an unbalanced approach depending on the funding received from the national and foreign donors. The state of Pakistan needs to address this issue with more focus to secure the future of the nation with above 60% youth.

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