

## ISLAM & PAKISTAN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract**

*This article talks about the current religious, political and social practices, worldviews of different scholars on these practices and my personal understanding of these worldviews with a special focus on Islam and Pakistan. It is considered that Islam is a religion that promotes authoritarianism, patriarchy and moralistic views, but I argue against such allegations on the basis of Quran and its scholars. At the same time, this article is an attempt to develop a critique of unjust socio-religious practices in the name of Islam, a misleading education system and raising question that why Islam was being misinterpreted or interpreted differently by specific schools of thought. These misinterpretations can be observed in the issues of gender inequality, forced marriages, corporal punishment, discriminating minorities, victimizing other groups who have different religious opinion and introduction of brutal laws like Hudood Ordinance. This article is also a critical review of political decisions made by the politicians throughout the history of Pakistan by using Islam for political gains.*

**Keywords:** Islam, Misinterpretation, Critical Analysis, Brutal Laws, Pakistan

### **INTRODUCTION**

Anyone walking past the door could hear the voice of a young, but tired man who was sitting on his very old, but comfortable chair. His room was filled with a mysterious echo of a deep long breath, his forehead was soaked in his sweat and he was holding an Urdu poetry book titled “*Zawal Apnay Urooj Par Hay*”. All of a sudden, he takes out the pen from his pocket, leans on the table in front of him and writes “Islam & Pakistan: A Critical Analysis”. A topic that has been following him since he was eight years old, a topic that he want to understand and share its importance with others. The article explains what Islam means to him, how he understand it, how it is used and abused in Pakistani society to achieve personal gains.

This article is a research work that talks about the current religious practices, worldviews of different scholars on these practices and personal understanding of these worldviews through Quran and its scholars. With ever changing circumstances, it is difficult for any institution, law and religion to have all

the answers to the arising questions and Islam has always provided an option of اجتهاد *ijtihad*. My main objection on the current narrative of Islam presented by Pakistani media or the way it is being practiced and presented by majority of Pakistani Muslim scholars is that it lacks the depth, logic, humanistic and relational approach, so this article is an attempt to critically analyze this approach.

This article also presents an analysis of so called Islamic teachings and education system that are based on made up stories. They have no historical or religious bases, but they are taught through formal and informal education systems that play a very important role in our society. There are so many books filled with these made up stories like (موت کا منظر) *Maut Ka Manzar*, but one book called (فضائل) (فضائل) *Faza'il-e-Amaal* written by Muhammad Zakariya Kandhlawi is very popular. It is a curriculum for *Tablighi Jamaat* (تبلیغی جماعت). "The book (*Faza'il-e-Amaal*) besides containing some authentic information also contains a number of weak, concocted, interpolated as well as fabricated *ahadith* (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad (Bagdadi 2012). In this regard, Javed Ahmad Ghamidi also thinks that although their work is for the betterment of Muslims, but the way is not according to what God has mentioned in Quran. Instead of using Quran, they rely on invented stories and that is where the problem comes (Ghamidi 2010).

## RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHOD

A research method is a strategy of inquiry which includes research design and data collection (Myers & Avison 2002). As the title of my thesis highlights that it is about different understandings and interpretations of available literature, religious laws, norms and mixing religion with culture. That is why I have decided to use hermeneutics and hermeneutic strategies as a theoretical base. I will use Hermeneutic in a systematic method, but more in a subjective way, so that I can interpret and understand the history of Islam and Pakistan. "Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation (Paterson & Higgs 2005)". As this research topic is very personal, familial and societal with special focus on religious aspects and its influence on relational shifts and behavioral pattern, I will use the literature written by Pakistani authors, international writers and Quran. Through these interpretations, I will try to get the answers to the questions "*why Islam has brought more division to Pakistan than unity? And what are the causes of the downfall of Pakistani society?*" To get some valuable answers, I will have to rely on the literature review and the interpretation of the opinion given by the scholars that is why I am using Hermeneutics which is a theory and practice of interpretation (Paterson & Higgs 2005).

### ISLAM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

I was born in a very religious Muslim family in 1980, the era when Islamization was flourishing under General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship. It was the time when religious and regional intolerance was on its peak. Seed of extremism was already sown. Shia Sunni division was getting louder and louder, *Shia kafir* and *crush India's* slogans and banners were a symbol of real Muslim and patriotism. "It is apparent to every keen eye that the greatest issue faced by Pakistan in current times is religious extremism. [...] Hundreds of children, adults and old people have fallen prey to it (Ghamidi 2015, 64)". Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan and Pakistan had gained so much importance for the west as it had become a strategic planning field (Shams 2016).

Since Pakistan came into being, it is very common to see Islam being used for political reasons. From Pakistan movement and throwing out Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government to jumping into Afghanistan's internal matter and ending up catering freedom fighters like Osama Bin Laden was an attempt to use Islam for political reasons. Pakistan's religiopolitical parties took lead "to capture power avowedly for the Islamization of Pakistan (Isani 2010, 02)". Even before the partition, initially Pakistan movement was purely on political basis, but later on some religious forces were able to convince Mr. Jinnah that religion can play an important role in the creation of Pakistan. "Maududi and Allama Iqbal had a great affect on Jinnah and made him realize the potential of using the religious card in politics (Isani 2010, 12)".

It is also believed that Islam promotes violence, sectarianism, radicalism and extremism. Its foundations are based on the principles that are inhumane or violate the basic rights like freedom of movement, freedom of speech and freedom of choice. Islam is considered to be a rigid entity in the West (Karim & Eid, 2012). We have seen in recent times that people who have written against Islam and especially against Prophet Muhammad they were targeted. These actions are being executed in the name of blasphemy. "The cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed, the prosecution of David Irving, the controversy surrounding the Abu Ghraib and Basra photos: each does present very different legal, ethical and historical issues. But at the heart of the debates and attendant violence of the last months are core questions: What are this right's boundaries?" (Callamard 2006, 02) These are the critical questions to ask, whether the disrespect according to a particular religious group should be punishable or not. It can be caricatures of Prophet Muhammad or talking about the Holocaust.

In my opinion, religion is longing for inner peace and a set of rituals to attain inner peace. During a personal interview, Professor Wolfgang Palaver said that "Every human being by nature is religious or spiritual" and when I asked that what is

religion for him? He replied: “A deeper longing for fulfillment (Palaver 2018)”. It is there to establish a connection between human beings and their creator. I understand religion a way of life without any social or cultural pressure. It gives the followers liberty to use their free will and no one has any authority over others to punish them for not following religion in a certain way. “There shall be no compulsion in the religion (Quran 2:256)”.

### MY DIFFERENCES IN UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

Newly elected government of economically devastated and war against terrorism torn Pakistan in 2018 decided to form an economic advisory committee. It included 18 renowned economists of the world and gave them the task to guide the government on the issues related to economics and to improve them. Immediately after its formation, news started circulating on social media that one of its members Mr. Atif Rehman Mian is ‘Ahmadi/Qadiani’. This news hit Pakistan like a storm and the government succumbed to the pressure of extremist religious mindset. It has outflanked even the celebrities and intellectuals of the society. Just to show a glimpse of a polarized mindset that has been developed using education system, below are some recent tweets of a female pop singer Rabi Pirzada and a retired senior judge of Pakistan Supreme Court.



*“Qadianis are apostates; if standing against them is extremism then I am an extremist” (Translated by the author)*





*“People who are appreciating the intelligence of ‘Mian Atif’, I would just say this for them that if Mian Atif had brain, he would not be a Qadiani (Translated by the author).*

This type of discrimination and human rights violation can be found in the constitution of Pakistan. One of the things that I do not agree with is the discriminatory contradiction between article 27, 41 and 260. On one side article 27 of the constitution protects the rights of a common citizen and talks against any discrimination, but article 260 where it defines who is a Muslim and article 41 that says a non-Muslim cannot be a president of Pakistan takes away the rights of the citizens given by the constitution (Constitution of Pakistan 1973). Originally, when the current constitution of Pakistan was drafted and approved by the National Assembly this point of Ahmadis being a non-Muslim was not part of it, but later on in 1974 through the second constitutional amendment it was introduced. According to Nadeem Farooq Paracha a renowned Pakistani writer and journalist, in the general election of 1970 Ahmadis voted for Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. His falling popularity in the left-wing corridors of political sphere and some other political realities of that time pushed him towards the second amendment (Paracha 2013). In my opinion, religion is someone’s personal matter and any government, state or person has nothing to do with it. An individual shall be free to choose whatever he/she wills. “The message of Islam is primarily addressed to an individual (Ghamidi 2015, 148)”.

In the past, many governments have used religion to achieve their objectives. One of its examples is the role of Pakistan during the cold war between the US and former Soviet Union and according to former secretary of state and presidential nominee of the US Mrs. Hilary Clinton the talibans were created to defeat and get rid of Soviet Union and it was a successful mission (Dawn 2009). Continuing with the same line, another topic that emerges and concerns me is the issue of treating children in ‘*madrassas*’. They also use Islam as a tool to protect their vested interest. These *madrassas* recruit children from poor background and treat them inhumanly. According to the annual report of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflicts, covering the January-December 2017 period says, “In Pakistan, the United Nations continued to receive reports of the recruitment and use of children, including from *madrassas*, and allegations of the use of children by armed groups for suicide attacks (Firstpost, 2018)”.



*Photo: Taken from the twitter*

In the above mentioned act of brutality, parents also play a very important role. Although, parents decide things about the lives of children, but they do not ask or involve them in their decision and Islam does not allow such things. Parents sometime forget that forcing children can make them distant and it also leave negative impact on children. It is a very common practice in Pakistan, can it be marital life, educational career or professional life, family's pressure always plays a very crucial role. "In spite of the status that Islam confers upon parents, they do not have the right to force their children (Ghamidi 2010)". And if you are a woman then it gets even harder.

Another issue that disturbs me a lot in the current setting and the viewpoint of majority Pakistani Muslim scholars is the creation and misuse of blasphemous laws. The way this law has been made and implemented it has no roots in Islamic teaching or sources like Quran or Hadiths. According to Mr. Ghamidi the possible basis of this law, in the opinion of some scholars, are the two verses of Quran (Ghamidi 2015, 258) where God says that people who wage war against Allah or Prophet Muhammad they should be punished severely because for them there will be a great disgrace in this world and a punishment in the hereafter, but if they repent just forgive them (Quran 5:33-34). In my opinion, these verses refer to someone who has declared a war against Allah and his messenger and not developing a simple disagreement or criticizing certain actions.

It is also important to note that in the verses (5:33-34) Quran does not bind Muslim leaders to make it a law and give capital punishment. In Quran, capital punishment can be given only on two offences. One, if someone disrupts, disturbs and challenges the writ of the government in a way that it poses threat to the lives of people and property. Two, if someone kills another human being (Ghamidi 2015, 259). With the current laws of blasphemy and capital punishment, I do not think that all these points were taken into consideration. It is necessary that the "narratives related to punishment for blasphemy that are often cited also need to be understood correctly (Ghamidi 2015, 260)".

In 1979, General Zia-u-Haq who is the master mind behind the militancy, sectarianism and polarization in Pakistan decided to introduce a law pertaining sexual offences labeled as 'Hudood Ordinance'. *Hudood* means limit or boundary and *Hudood* laws were meant to limits of an acceptable behavior. In the light of these laws, any sexual act committed outside a legal marriage is considered a crime. According to this law even a rape victim will have to proof his/her innocence otherwise he/she will be punished. "This law was considered intrinsically misogynistic since its application resulted in women being convicted of adultery/fornication if they reported a case of rape (Dawn 2011)". "In addition to other problems created by these laws, their judicial application also made it easier to get away with crimes against women such as honour killings and general degradation and humiliation of women in society (Dawn 2011)". With this law, everyone was handed in the license to kill a girl and name it as honor killing or rape victim survivors would not go to the court as they were bound to provide four pious men to prove their case (Dawn 2011).

The point here I want to make is that according to this ordinance, not only people could use this law to justify killing a women, but also if even ten or twenty women will witness a rape the accused will not get punished under this law. On top of that the rape survivor cannot testify as well. It is completely against Quran as it is mentioned in (24:6-10) that if someone accuses the other one he/she will have to present testimonies, but if it is not possible then his/her testimony will be accepted.

### **PAKISTAN: A NATION STATE AND ISLAM**

When I look at Pakistani society, religion plays a very important role in the life of people and that is why whoever came to this land, if they used religion as a tool they were successful, but if they decided to challenge the religion, it became difficult for them to survive. During the Pakistan movement same thing was done by Allama Muhammad Iqbal who was once considered very enlightened and moderate Muslim scholar and philosopher along with another enlightened scholar Maulana Maududi, he convinced Mr. Jinnah to use religion to gain political milestone. Same Maududi, who was not in favor of creating Pakistan. "Maududi and Allama Iqbal had a great affect on Jinnah and made him realize the potential of using the religious card in politics. When the Muslim League started using religion in politics with great success and ended up scoring a remarkable victory in the elections of 1945-46 (Isani 2010, 12-13)". This was one of the classic examples of using religion for political goals and its success encouraged Maududi to use Islam over and over again, so he did it against democratically elected government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as well.

While criticizing loyalists and political stooges K.K. Aziz says that lots of facts were being distorted and personalities were posed in a way as they were the

only ones who created Pakistan (1993). Kids are taught hatred and discrimination based on falsehood. There are hundreds of examples, but one of his quotation I will use here as an example "The Muslims treated the non-Muslims very well [when they ruled the province]. Yet the non-Muslims nursed in their hearts an enmity against the Muslims. When the British invaded the area the non-Muslims sided with them and against the Muslims. So the British conquered the whole country (Aziz 1994, 12)". It is again an act of inciting deep rooted violence, preaching hatred and intolerance in the name of Islam.

### **TWO NATION THEORY AND ITS LATER EFFECTS**

An ideology that is considered to be behind the creation of Pakistan was two nation theory (Saeed 2009, 06). This theory was actually to establish a distinction between 'us' and 'them'; 'us' being Muslims and 'them' being Hindus. The colonial concept of divide and rule was implemented in this theory and it brought into the light. Bigotry was sown in the minds of general population that resulted into the concept that Muslims cannot live peacefully with Hindus within one country, but actually this divide was just to gain power over a certain group of people (Jalal 1995). If we look at the leaders around the globe and the history of mankind, theocracy is not an alien idea. Not so long before the creation of Pakistan, in the Indian subcontinent Arabs and Moguls used the same idea and were glorified by the Muslim leaders. In his critique of Muslim invaders Mr. Aziz says that the leaders who were glorified by the leader of subcontinent were nothing more than simple invaders. Hindus and Sikhs do not consider them their heroes and before their arrivals there were no Muslims in the region, so who are we to claim that Muslim leaders have changed their lives and people were so inspired that they have adopted Muslim life style. He further questions that if this is true then why Hindus do not eat beef (Aziz, 1994).

After learning the art of theocracy from the past, Muslim leaders started applying it during the Pakistan movement. They decided to promote the idea of having an Islamic state combining with nationalistic approach. This nexus seemed a perfect formula to come into power. "The architects of Pakistan embraced the idea of the nation-state without conceding space to territorial nationalism in their official ideology (Jalal 1995, 74)". The idea of Muslim nation is not an Islamic idea. Nowhere in Quran or *hadiths* we can find this idea. "It is not a requirement of Islam or a directive of its *Shariah* that the nationhood of Muslims should be based on religion and hence all Muslims must become one nation (Ghamidi 2015, 164-165)". Although, there is no such directives from Quran or *hadiths*, but people of that time and majority of Pakistanis are of the opinion that it was and is an Islamic cause.

### **COLD WAR, ISLAM AND PAKISTAN**

Setting aside the merits and demerits of using Islam and two nation theory in Pakistan movement, world had come to know that Islam had played a very

important role in the partition of Indian subcontinent and creation of Pakistan. Even the secular leaders like Muhammad Ali Jinnah had to shift his stance to fit in the general expectation of the public and the establishment. After the partition the idea of one nation one language resulted in a huge loss in 1971, but even then the establishment did not learn any lesson and it continued its adventures in the shape of General Zia-ul-Haq. The effects of Islamization that are omnipresent in Pakistani society nowadays are the aftermath of General Zia's eleven years of brutal dictatorship. Support of military establishment, religious groups, right wing political forces, Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and the US aid made General Zia more powerful than ever before. Although, the US did not have any direct interest in South Asia, but it was helping Great Britain to keep an eye on Russia and was also in competition of power with the other global players in the region. "The British played the "Great Game" against Russia, trying to block Czarist expansion through the northwest (Khyber Pass) into South Asia. The US strategic interests and perspective regarding South Asia, from the very beginning, were strongly influenced by the British who wanted the US to assume the role of a successor (Hilali 2005, 70)".

Soviet invasion in Afghanistan presented to the West and especially to the US an opportunity to end 'the Great Game' or 'the Cold War'. Before even Soviet Union landed the foots on ground in Afghanistan, CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and State department had already started negotiating with Afghan *Mujahideen* in Pakistan. They made Afghanistan a Soviet Vietnam by using Talibans, Pakistan and Islamization as a driving force. CIA with the collaboration of ISI (Inter-Service Intelligence) provided *Mujahideen* with weapons and recruited young Muslims around the globe to fight a 'holy war' in the name of Islam against Soviet Union (Mamdani, 2004). In my opinion, the real extreme version of political Islamization got validation when Mr. Reagan invited leaders of Afghan *Mujahideen* to the White House and said, "These gentlemen are the moral equivalents of America's founding fathers (Mamdani, 2004, 119)".

The Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on record accepted that the US was the one that created Talibans and used extremist ideology against Soviet Union and this policy backfired; Mamdani says that CIA organized Talibans, funded them, recruited them and taught them the radical version of brutal, authoritative, moral and patriarchal Islam. The US claimed to have created a group of *Jihadists* for liberation, but in fact they have created a group of terrorists who has nothing to do with Islam, but to fulfill their personal agendas (Mamdani 2004). Upon concluding this subchapter, I would like to say that once again Islam was being used as a tool to motivate its followers for political purposes.

### **EDUCATION SYSTEM OF PAKISTAN**

Education plays a very important role in the growth, intellectual maturity and deeper understanding of life. Stephen R. Covey quotes Greek biographer Diogenes

Laertius in his book "The Leader in Me" by saying "The foundation of every state is the education of its youth (Covey 2008, 134)". Education system in Pakistan is facing a few serious problems. To start with, it is running on a three parallel education systems such as English medium school system, Urdu medium school system and *madrassa* education. In Pakistan's formal education system, irrespective of English medium or Urdu medium school system the content and its validity raise plenty of question marks. The syllabus provided by the government of Pakistan contains misconceptions, false historical facts, biased information and a discriminatory point of view to brainwash children (Aziz 1993).

Another factor that plays an important role in Pakistan's education system is gender and regional imbalance. Quality of education provided in Islamabad, Lahore or Karachi is completely different than in the farfetched areas of Pakistan. Although, the ratio of male and female population in Pakistan is almost the same, but the number of male students is way more than female. Mr. Aziz while referring to the educational books taught in our schools says that this content can teach our kids how to read and write, but it does not serve as a tool for critical thinking, attention to truth, precision, clarity, accuracy, validity and fidelity to facts. As they only contain plain lies, superficiality, misjudgments, self-deception and unnecessary glorification of people (Aziz 1993, 121). "The current education system in Pakistan is gradually distancing our nation from its cultural tradition. A short discussion with the members of the young generation makes one realize that it will not take more than a couple of decades before we will have lost our memory as a nation (Ghamidi 2015, 80)". They think that they are the sole responsible for whole Muslim world (Ghamidi, 2015).

Although for the government and private stakeholders, it is necessary and the same time a difficult task to reform the entire educational system of Pakistan, but in my opinion, working on formal education would be much easier than the *madrassas*. Roughly, there are fifteen thousand *madrassas* in Pakistan and in these *madrassas*, there are around 1.7 million students are enrolled. There are four main Muslim sects in Pakistan *Deoband*, *Barelvi*, *Ahl-e-Hadith* and *Shia*. All of these sects have their own *madrassas*, their own syllabus and their own federation that is called *wafaq-ul-Madaris*, but it is so ironic that except *wafaq-ul-Madaris*, financial or political agenda these sects do not agree with each other (Ahmad 2009, 03-04).

Even though the religious syllabus of these *madrassas* is extremely old, but the majority of the teachers and students think that it fulfills all the current needs. "The curricula of the *madrassas* are regulated by their respective boards, and have not undergone any significant changes in their core content since inception in the 19th century (Ahmad 2009, 05)". Mr. Ghamidi says, in *madrassas* there are four things every teacher teaches to his/her students; 1) if someone commits the crime of polytheism or apostasy, it is our duty to kill that person; 2) if someone is a non-Muslim he/she is meant to be subjugated; 3) all Muslims must have one *khilafat* and

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4) the concept of nation state is illegitimate. He goes on and says that another crime that our madrassas commit is that they enroll students of five to six years old and teach them how to become a scholar without any broad base education which is against human rights. You cannot take a child who does not know anything and put him/her to become a doctor, engineer or scientist. First, you need to give him/her basic education and then he/she choose to pursue any field they want (Ghamidi 2015).

## CONCLUSION

According to my findings the most important sector that Pakistani government and society can think to work on is to invest in educating people. There should be only one system of education because having English medium, Urdu medium and religious education separately creates classes and divisions in the society. *Madrassas* should be under the supervision of the government, for someone to get higher religious education it should be an obligation to complete twelve years of broad based basic education first. Another thing that education system should pay attention to is how to indulge into a healthy debate and critical thinking without accusing, threatening or harming others.

There is nothing wrong in receiving some criticism and it is fine if someone has a different opinion because the beauty lies in diversity. If at the time of Prophet Muhammad, there was no punishment for blasphemy. So, in my opinion, there should not be any blasphemy law as we have seen in Asia Bibi's case, it was used for political reason or to feed personal animosity. Pakistan's ministry of religious affairs, Pakistani government and general public should take notice of the syllabus taught by *Tablighi Jamaat* that contains so many made up stories without any connection to Islam, but are use with the concept that lies are fine as long as they provide a good end results. Children should be educated at school that religion and culture are two different entities, they should be treated separately and religion should never be used for personal, social or political reasons. Children should also be taught about the importance of personal, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being.

The constitution of Pakistan contains quite a number of laws which need to be revisited, emended or dissolved and *Hudood Ordinance* is one of them. Pakistan government needs to look at it and come up with a law that does not discriminate any gender and is logical in terms of implementation. The government should also revisit the articles 27, 41 and 260 of the constitution. There is a contradiction among these articles and as they are not based on equality; they violate human rights. Last but not least *ijtihad* as I have mentioned it before and also the scholars have shed some light on it that *ijtihad* is one of the most versatile law making opportunities that

Islam has provided to its followers. So, the government should educate not only the masses, but also form a public committee that should deal with all the issues faced by the public and come up with solution while practicing *ijtihad*.

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