

Aneela Sultana¹

TALIBAN OR TERRORIST? SOME REFLECTIONS ON TALIBAN'S IDEOLOGY

The Western vision of Islam is firmly anchored in the crusades, with images of holy warriors, fired with the passion of martyrs, storming the battlements of some crusader castle. Within the Western psyche there appears to be almost paranoid fear of Islam as something wild, mindless and potentially overwhelming. The Western media has created simplistic image of Muslims as terrorists and oppressors through the catch-all term 'Islamic fundamentalists'. Therefore it is a difficult task to analyze ideology of Taliban's objectively as there is a great fear to be entrapped by the negative stereotypes created and propagated by the West. The present paper is an attempt to discuss contours of Taliban's philosophy and ideology in order to understand their perspective on the authenticity of their leadership. It will shed light on their interpretation of religion and culture as well as the role of *Madrassas* in the nurturing of Taliban's.

The word "Taliban" literally mean "student" in Arabic. However, in Persian this plural form of "*talib*" means "religious student". The word is merely applied to those who seek religious scholarship in traditional circles of learning, namely *madrrasahs*. The students enrolled in theological and Islamic studies in modern universities are not called "*talib*". The elementary school for Muslim boys and in some cases girls is called the *Kattab* (Arabic for "School"). Another term for it is *maktab*. The earliest of these schools used simple Arabic poetry and proverbs as texts for teaching reading. The methods of teaching have been various in *maktabs* depending on historical

¹ The author of this article is Ms. Aneela Sultana who is an academic cultural anthropologist. Ms. Sultana is currently teaching at the department of anthropology of Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. She has contributed various articles to national and international journals. Her major areas of interest include religion, gender and politics.

stages and geographical locations, yet there has always been a strong emphasis on reading and memorizing the Qur'an, as well as traditions transmitted from the prophet and eminent pioneers of Islam. Schooling in the elementary form might continue up to age 15. Traditional sayings of the prophet Muhammad and His disciples have always played a crucial part in formulating the educational agenda of these schools. These sayings are usually looked upon as the chief source of interpretation of legislative, ethical, theological and social laws and rules. In many cases where there is lack of explicit Quranic texts, these sayings bridge the gap. The truth of the matter is that since there is a consensus among all Muslims concerning any single Quranic Text, the theological disputes have historically been a product of alternative interpretation, which in turn predominantly results in various methods of approach to these sayings. Therefore every *madrasah*, depending on its theological affiliation, promotes certain ways of dealing with these sayings. Nonetheless, in schools where advanced studies are not pursued and concentration is mostly on elementary stages these sayings are only used for moral application and proper conduct without going too deeply into considerations pertinent to their authenticity.²

It was the great achievement of the *madrasah* to collect and translate the culture of ancient Greece and later to transmit it to Europe during the Late Middle Ages. By introduction of modern and somewhat secular concepts such as new system of education, which at times include even theology in state organized and maintained institutions, the Muslim traditionalists felt challenged. The reaction was to keep the old styles of learning and to respond to political pressure on their governments. They believed the newly introduced systems were wrong in all dimensions including academic material, teaching styles and most importantly the way by which the teachers would be selected. They proclaimed their belief that a teacher must be selected not merely on the basis of his teaching qualifications but also through his commitment to religious values. They stated that the spirit of Islam must prevail in the whole process of teaching regardless of the subject. However, the *Ulema's*³ attempt to restore the glories of *madrasahs* were futile due largely to their failure to furnish an adequate replacement to advanced patterns of natural and technological studies introduced by modern systems. Consequently the educational activities of *madrasahs* became contracted to studies of purely religious nature. Notwithstanding, the *Ulema* were not prepared at all to admit defeat and promulgated that 'the knowledge divined from revelation (meaning scholastic study of religion) is superior to that of experimental acquisition |(meaning the natural

² Gohari, 2001:31-32.

³ Islamic Scholars.

science).⁴ According to their teaching, the Qur'an and Holy Sayings contain the solutions to political, economic and social dilemmas, and statesmen are required to seek the advice of the *Ulemas* and their approval in order to render their administration legitimate in the religious sense. Despite this, with the progress of technology, schools are attempting to become equipped with facilities such as computers, modern library systems and times foreign language programs.⁴

Islam has always been beset by revivalist movements aimed at counter-acting an apparent backsliding by those in power in relation to the founding principals recited in accordance with divine inspiration. Movements have arisen in Islamic world in response to what has been seen as corrupt and unprincipled behavior on the part of government. The movements have generally taken a puritanical form and there has been a resort to arms to impose the new vision on society. It may also be useful to reconsider the relationship between religious movements of a radical or fundamentalist nature and major crises in the society. It has been noted that countries affected by chronic civil conflict often referred to within the humanitarian aid world as complex emergencies- produce Christian and Islamic revivalist movements in which efforts are made to return to what are regarded as absolute truths of the religion, and to eradicate any influences that have appeared to weaken religious beliefs. It could be suggested that this is a response to chaos, an attempt to create a tightly defined framework within which society can be contained, a determined effort to hold back a process by which society gradually being overwhelmed by potentially destructive forces. There have been many examples in both Christianity and Islam of movements emerging that have imposed highly specific codes of conduct and dress on their adherents in order to provide a secure containing environment in what is felt to be a chaotic or overwhelming world.⁵

The major fear amongst leaders of religious movements has been that the societies to which they belonged would lose their religious beliefs that the wave of secularism would overtake them. This has been a real fear in the Islamic world ever since the West started to play a dominant role on the world stage, particularly over the last couple of centuries. It has prompted both religious scholars and intellectuals in the Islamic world to reflect on why Western society was able to dominate others, and what this indicated in terms of how Islam might be modified to adapt to new circumstances. Some have advocated that Islam should seek to incorporate what was seen to be best from Western society while retaining those aspects of Islam that were

⁴ Gohari, 2001:31-32.

⁵ Marsden, 2002: 58-59.

felt to be superior to what the West had to offer. Others have felt that Islam should be modernized and adapted to the new circumstances in which it found itself in order to strengthen it *vis-à-vis*, the West. Yet others have rejected any kind of accommodation with Western values and have sought to return to the key elements of Islam, at the same time removing all vestiges of Western influence.⁶ The same case happened with Taliban who first claimed that they were fighting purely for the word of Islam to remain magnificent. However, at the same time they gave greater stress on the objective to purify the country from the harms of duplicity that manifested them in the so called *Mujahidden*.

The Taliban had set out as an Islamic reform movement. Throughout Muslim history, Islamic reform movements have transformed both the nature of belief and political and social life, as Muslim nomadic tribes destroyed other Muslim empires, transformed them, and then were themselves urbanized and later destroyed. This political change has always been made possible through the concept of Jihad⁷. Western thought, heavily influenced by the medieval Christian Crusades has always portrayed Jihad as an Islamic war against unbelievers. But essentially Jihad is the inner struggle of a Muslim to become a better human being, improve himself and help his community. Jihad is also a testing ground for obedience to God and implementing His commands on earth. Jihad is the inner struggle of Moral discipline and commitment to Islam and political action. Islam also sanctions rebellion against an unjust ruler, whether Muslim or not a Jihad is the mobilizing mechanism to achieve change. Thus the life of the Prophet Mohammad has become the *jihadi* model of impeccable Muslim behavior and political change as the Prophet himself rebelled, with deep religious and moral anger, against the corrupt Arab society he was living in. The Taliban were thus acting in the spirit of the Prophet's Jihad when they attacked the rapacious warlords around them. Yet Jihad does to sanction the killing of fellow Muslims on the basis of ethnicity or sect and it is this, the Taliban interpretation of Jihad, which appalls the non-*Pashtuns*. While the Taliban claim they are fighting a Jihad against corrupt, evil Muslims, the ethnic minorities see them as using Islam as a cover to exterminate non-*Pashtuns*.⁸

Over the years Islamic scholars have debated at length how best to respond to situation that were not envisaged at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and on which earlier scholars have not pronounced. Each generation of scholars has produced new rules to accommodate the unforeseen, drawing on the Qur'an and the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Holy war to defend or spread Islam.

⁸ Rashid, 2000: 87.

Hadith, the saying and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as reported by his adherents. Four schools of Islamic or Shari'a⁹ law developed, some of which took a more uncompromising stand towards the interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith. It is accepted that culture and religion influence each other and their mutual relationship are quite explicit in the development of Taliban's ideology. It has been observed that Islam too incorporated aspects of the cultures it encountered in its forward march. For example, the extremely strict ideology of Taliban's is considered to be emerged from a combination of *Deobandi*¹⁰ radical interpretation of Islam and *Pashtun* tribal code of honor. The Taliban theological ideology is derived from Hanafite School and the methodological approach of the Taliban to this school is a matter of political as well as academic concern. The Hanafite school of Hanafyyah is also called *Madhhab Hanafi* in Islam and is one of the four main *sunni* schools of religious law, incorporating the legal opinions of the ancient Iraqi schools of Al-Kufah and Basra. The Hanafite legal system developed from the teaching of the theologian and jurispudent Imam Abu Hanifah (c. 700-767) by such disciples as Abu Yusuf (d.798) and became the official system of Islamic legal interpretation for the Abbasids, Seljuqs, and Ottomans. In spite of the fact that the Hanafite acknowledge the Qur'an and Hadith (narratives concerning the Prophet's life and sayings) as primary sources of law, they are noted for the acceptance of personal opinion (*ra'y*) in the absence of precedent. Presently the school predominated in Central Asia, India, Pakistan, Turkey and the countries of the former Ottoman Empire.¹¹

The *Deobandis* took a restrictive view of the role of women, opposed all forms of hierarchy in the Muslim community and rejected the Shia – but the Taliban were to take these beliefs to an extreme which the original *Deobandis* would never have recognized.

Deobandi madrassas developed much faster in Pakistan after its reaction in 1947. The *Deobandis* set up the JUI, a purely religious movement to propagate their beliefs and mobilize the community of believers. In 1962 its leader in the North West Frontier Province NWFP, Maulana Ghulam Ghaus Hazarvi turned the JUI into a political party, as a result of which it quickly split into several factions. Maulana Mufti Mehmood, a dynamic leader, took over the *Pashtun* faction of the JUI in the NWFP

⁹ The canon of Islamic law.

¹⁰ There are four schools of Sunni Islamic teaching, all of which were established during the Abbasid Empire (750 CE-1258 CE): Shafii, Hanbali, Maliki and Hanafi. The Hanafi School is considered the most open to individual interpretation (*ijtihad*) in its tea-chings and has more adherents than any other branch. The Deobandi School and the *Taliban* are strict followers of the *Hanafi* legal code. It has faced competition from Wahhabi teachings (a harsher variant of the Hanbali school) since the 1970's or so.

¹¹ Gohari, 2001:27.

and remolded it in a populist form. Mufti Mehmood's JUI played a leading role in the 1970 elections mobilizing support against military rule. He propagated a 22-point Islamic agenda, which includes a progressive social program and a strong anti American, anti imperialist stance. The JUI campaign was marked by a bitter feud with the Jamaat-e-Islami and the rift between the two largest Islamic parties persists to this day. The *Deobandi* creed was to become the primary religious and ideological influence on the Taliban. During The 1980s Pakistan's Afghan policy was conducted with the help of the jamaat-e-Islami and Hikmetyar's Hizb-e-Islami, who were also the main rivals of the JUI inside Pakistan. The ISI's connection with the Jamaat-e-Islami was an important policy instrument in the distributing of aid to the *Mujaheddin*. The JUI, which was now run by Mufti Mehmood's son, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, was given no political role and the small pro-Deobandi Afghan *Mujaheddin* groups were largely ignored.¹²

However, the JUI used this period to set up hundreds of *madrassas* along the *Pashtun* belt in the NWFP and Baluchistan where it offered young Pakistanis and Afghan refugees the chance of a free education, food, shelter and military training. These *madrassas* were to train a new generation of Afghans for the post-Soviet period. Even though the *Deobandis* received no political support, the military regime of President Zia ul Haq funded *madrassas* of all sectarian persuasions. In 1971 there were only 900 *madrassas* in Pakistan, but by the end of the Zia era in 1988 there were 8,000 *madrassas* and 25,000 unregistered ones, educating over half a million students. As Pakistan's state-run educational system steadily collapse, these *madrassas* became the only avenue for boys from poor families to receive the semblance of an education.¹³ This kind of educational system has accelerated the growth of young potential as *talibs* and holy protectors.

Interestingly, Taliban's ideology is not only influenced by *Deobandi's* school of Islam but it is also ingrained with *Pushton* code of conduct (*pushtoonwali*). The main components of *Pushtonwali* include *malmastia* (hospitality), *nanavata* (to apologize), *panawarkawal* (to give shelter), *pardah* (seclusion), *tor* (blame for guilty), *badal* (to take revenge). *Badal* is an important component of *Pushtoonwali* which is directly related to *nang* (honor). It traditionally spells the right of every man to take the revenge for the harm he received. Factors that call for *badal* can range from more severe crimes as murder or adultery to a lesser degree of crimes such as abuse and humiliation. This tradition when becomes chronic might bring negative consequences such as the removal of most young members of *Pashtun* society on

¹² Rashid, 2000: 89.

¹³ Ibid.

the name of *badal*. But the practice of *badal* is socially appreciated as it is done with the intention of safeguarding family's honor.

If a family or tribe has failed or unable to take revenge for the insult and damage it received then they are considered too feeble to protect their respect which destroys their reputation. On the contrary the feature of *nanavata* (sanctuary/refuge) resolves many disputes. In this system the guilty person is brought before the complainant family along with the imam so that the matter can be resolved peacefully without damaging the wishes of either party. Once the matter is resolved, members of both parties greet each other and have dinner together and take oath not to repeat such conflicts in future. *Nanavata* ensures that protection is given to the enemy if they personally approach complainant party and request for sanctuary and forgiveness. Once the accused or guilty party show reliance on the benevolence of other tribe then there remains no more offense and harsh feelings and the issue is handled and mediated tranquilly. *Malmastia* ensures greater hospitality towards a guest in order to secure good will of the guest and his family and tribe. *Malmastia* helps to create more friendly and cooperative relationships.

On some points *Pushtunwali* and Sharia's law are in conflict with each other. For example, proof of adultery according to Sharia's law is dependent on four witnesses but in *Pushtoonwali* hearsy evidence is considered sufficient because that is honor of the family which is the issue, not the morality of the situation. The tradition of *tor* (blame for guilty) ensure who break moral code of *pushtun* society and it ensures strict punishments for those who commit adultery in order to remove the curse of infidelity.

Women in *Pushtun* society are not allowed to inherit property while the Qur'an provides that a female shall inherit half of the male. One of the most prominent examples of this confrontation is in the practice of *badal*. Vendetta killings are decidedly un-Islamic, as shown by the very origins of Islam itself. The founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, was born in tribal Arabia and vendetta killings were widely practiced there by the polytheistic inhabitants of the region.¹⁴ Once Mohammed gained enough political power from his conquests of Mecca and Medina to create genuine social change amongst tribal converts, one of his first targets were these vendettas. He viewed this practice as not only irrational and destructive, but as abhorrent to God, especially when it was Muslim killing Muslim. He believed that Muslims should always live in peace with each other, for allegiance to Islam (and by extension fellow Muslims) was more important than loyalty to tribes and their worldly quarrels. Related to *badal*, the *Pushtun* practice of warfare stipulates that the

¹⁴ Rodinson, 1971:155.

killer or conqueror is allowed to usurp or destroy the property of and even the personal freedom of the vanquished¹⁵. This also flies in the face of Sharia law, as such thefts are considered to be outside the bounds of appropriate conduct in wartime. Muslims, especially when fighting other Muslims, are expected to show mercy towards, to leave intact the property of and to respect the dignity of the vanquished, albeit this was and is imperfectly followed even by the Prophet himself.¹⁶

Though *Pushtunwali* is still paramount in the lives of many *Pushtun*, it too has made exceptions where Islamic law can override it. *Pushtunwali* explicitly allows an Islamic expert to override the tenants of the code in special circumstances. These circumstances could be when tribes or the *Pushtun* as a whole have to band together to face an outside threat, and need a religious authority figure to sanction their actions¹⁷. There has historically been a tension between *Pushtunwali* and Islam, with Islam and the *Ulema* who are the main vehicles for its promotion- representing a movement away from its inward-looking tribalism towards a transcendence over tribal, ethnic and national allegiances. This has manifested itself into struggles for influence and power between *Ulema* and tribal leaders, the latest backed by mullahs. Periodically the mullahs have called men in the tribal areas for Jihad and this has been done without regard to the views or authenticity of the tribal leaders. An important element in *Pushtun* culture is that adherents of the *Pushtunwali* attach greater emphasis to the value system it incorporates than to their membership to the *Pushtun* community or of the nation. One can see here a possible parallel with the Taliban's emphasis on values and the very clear view that the preservation and promotion of these values precedence over material considerations. Peter Marsden suggests that because Taliban originated in *Pushtun* heartland, their philosophy owes much to *Pushtunwali*, whereby *Ulema* used to call on men to disregard *Pushtunwali* for a period in favor of Sharia in order to engage in Jihad against a common enemy. However, the Taliban originated in the *Pushtun* areas rather than the north where the religious traditions were relatively more difficult and perhaps more open to the Islamic ideologies than the impassioned response to the call of the Jihad in defense of social values present in the south. There are a range of influences in the creed of Taliban, drawn from Islamic movements in Middle East, Iran, Indian sub-continent and Afghanistan. However, the dominant influence appears to be that of Afghan *Ulema*, who could be perceived as seeking a return to the statuesque there

¹⁵ Magnus, 2002:78.

¹⁶ Rodinson, 1971:173.

¹⁷ Magnus, 2002:78.

existed before the intellectual movements of the 1950s and 1960s set in motion a chain of events from which Afghanistan is still reeling.

The objectives of the Taliban movement were well encapsulated in an interview given by Taliban's spokesman, Mullah Wakil Ahmed, published in the Arabic Magazine *Al-Majallas* on 23rd October 1996. Asked how and why Taliban's movement has started, he replied:

After the Mujahidin parties came into power in 1992, Afghan people thought that peace would prevail in the country. However the leaders began to fight over power in Kabul. Some local leaders, particularly in Kandahar, formed armed gangs that fought each other. There was wide spread corruption and theft, and there were road-blocks everywhere. Women were being attacked, raped and killed. Therefore, after these incidents, a group of students from religious schools decided to rise against these leaders in order to alleviate the sufferings of the residents of the Kandahar Province. We were able to take control of several centers until we reached Kandahat and the former leaders fled from there.

Further clarification of Taliban's creed was given by the Taliban's Voice of Sharia radio station on 5 Nov. 1996:

The Taliban's who have emerged from the masses of the people, have started their struggle to deliver their compatriots from pain and hardship, to ensure complex peace and security across the country by collecting weapons, by doing away feudal principalities here and there in the country and by creating a powerful Islamic government in Afghanistan.

Mullah Amir Khan Motaqi, the Taliban's minister of information and culture explained in a sermon at Friday prayer on 15 Nov. 1996:

There no longer exists any cruelty, oppression, savagery, selfishness in the framework of the Islamic government. Instead, there is legality and fulfillment of the holy Sharia of Muhammad, the peace and blessings of God be upon him, both in words and actions. The Islamic state of Afghanistan, under the leadership of Taliban Islamic movement, has put into practice every thing that it has preached, according to God's law and the guidance of the magnificent holy Qur'an. Any step which has been taken by the Islamic state has been in conformity with the Sharia and whatever has been said in words has been implemented in action.

Attorney General Maulvi Jalil-Ullah Maulvizada said:

Let us state what sort of education the UN wants. This is a big infidel policy which gives such obscene freedom to women which would lead to adultery and herald the destruction of Islam. In any Islamic country where adultery becomes common, that country is destroyed and enters the domination of the infidels because their men become like women and women cannot defend themselves. Anybody who talks to us should do so within Islam's. The Holy Qur'an cannot adjust itself according to other people requirements; people should adjust themselves to the requirements of the Holy Qur'an¹⁸

The Taliban's have clear policy on the moral conduct and dress code for men and women. As noted by Peter Marsden, there are four main elements of their policy: a ban on the employment of women, except in the health sector; a temporary halt to formal female education pending the drawing up of an appropriate curriculum; the imposition of strict dress code on men and women, the introduction of strict control on the mobility of women outside homes so that women are always separated from male strangers or are always escorted by male relatives.¹⁹ On 6th December 1996, the Department of the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice announced that it had punished 225 women the previous day, in accordance with the Sharia, for violating its rules on clothing. It stated:

As the dignity and honor of a Muslim woman is ensured by observing hijab (seclusion from society) as requested by Sharia, all honorable sisters are strongly asked to completely observe hijab as recommended by Sharia. This can be achieved only if our dear sister wears burqa²⁰, because full hijab cannot be achieved by wearing only a chadar (a large piece of cloth that envelops the body and covers head but leaves all or part of the face uncovered, at the discretion of the wearer). In case of violation, no one will have the right to complaint.

The above mentioned discussion reveals Taliban's strict gender policy which is frequently ostracized by the international media for being strict and imposing. But covering both sides of the story is always necessary to see a clear picture. Here I will quote the experience of Yvonne Ridley who is a British journalist and used to write for Sunday Express. She went to Afghanistan to report on the war and crossed the border without passport. She was caught by the Taliban who kept her imprisoned for

¹⁸ Interview with Maulvi Jalil-Ullah Maulvizada in Kabul (1997) quoted by Ahmed Rashid in his book "Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia".

¹⁹ Marsden, 2002:87.

²⁰ Head to toe veil worn by Muslim women.

11 days. During her captivity she was offered to embrace Islam but she refused. She promised Taliban that after her release she will study holy Qur'an and the teachings of Islam and she later fulfilled her promise. She studied holy Qur'an and converted to Islam in summer 2003. In her book "In the Hands of the Taliban" she particularly thanked them for being nice and hospitable with her during her captivity. Now she started wearing *hijab* and considers it protection for women against evil eyes. She teaches the advantages of *hijab* to her 13 years old daughter named Daisy who is yet not Muslim but she is upbringing her according to the teachings of Islam. She wants her to study Islam herself. Ridley has stopped drinking and smoking and trying to avoid all those activities which are considered sin in Islam. She says that in Islam maintaining moral conduct is compulsory for both male and female. If she advises women to cover themselves then it also orders men to lower their gaze. She confessed that during investigation in Jalal Abad she was not even stared once by any captor rather they were used to look at the walls and ceiling while asking questions. Many times she was alone but she was never harassed or paid any attention by a male. Now she feels proud to be a devout Muslim and part of larger Muslim Ummah.²¹

Ahmed Rashid stated that thousands of educated families fled from Kabul for Pakistan simply because their children can no longer receive an education. He asked Qalamuddin what justified the Taliban's ban on women from working or going to school. "*We will be blamed by our won people if we don't educate women and we will provide education for them eventually, but now we have serious problem*" he replied and further said that, "*there are security problems and there are no provisions for separate transport, separate Scholl building and facilities to educate women for the moment. Women must be completely segregated from men. And within us we have those men who cannot behave properly with women. We lost two million people in the war against the Soviets because we had no Sharia law. We fought for Sharia and now this is the organization that will implements it. I will implement it come what may*" Qalamudin said emphatically.²²

Men have also been required to conform to a strict dress code, avoiding Western clothing and abstaining from shaving. On 5th December 1996, the Department of the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice quoted a Hadith:

Since the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, did not trim his beard throughout his life, therefore all government employees are hereby informed that they

²¹ The community of all Muslims, the larger Muslim world.

²² Rashid, 2000:106.

should grow their beards within a month and half, in accordance with the noble Hadith of the Prophet, in order to be a true Muslim.

The requirements that men should pray five times per day, ideally in a mosque, grow their beards, keep un-styled hairs and wearing of turban and *shalwar qameez* (traditional dress), is demanded by the Taliban's to ensure a high degree of religious observance. Taliban also claim that their prime objective is to achieve social justice, stability and law and order through Islamic doctrine and principals. For that they laid the foundations of an institution which they believe to have its roots in the Holy Qur'an. In a statement issued by Mufti Rasheed Ahmed from Darul Ifta-e-Wal Irshad, Karachi, it is stated:

It is compulsory and a debt upon Muslims to provide, moral, political and financial support to the heroes of Islam. 'The Taliban' who are free from the destructive yoke of the World Bank, IMF, UN and others. Remember! Only 'the Taliban' can help the Islamic world out of their eternal and internal crises.

The Taliban also banned every conceivable form of entertainment, which in a poor, deprived country such as Afghanistan was always in short supply anyway. Afghans were ardent movie-goers but movies, TV, videos, music and dancing were all banned. *Of course we realize that people need some entertainment but they can go to the parks and see the flowers, and from this they will learn about Islam*, Mullah Mohammed Hassan told me. According to Education Minister Mullah Abdul Hanifi, the Taliban oppose music because it creates a strain in the mind and hampers study of Islam. Singing and dancing were banned at weddings which for centuries had been major social occasions from which hundreds of musicians and dancers made a living. Most of them fled to Pakistan.²³

The Taliban's new model for a purist Islamic revolution has also created immense repercussions, in Pakistan and to a more limited extent in the Central Asian Republics. Pakistan, an already fragile state beset by an identity crisis, an economic meltdown, ethnic and sectarian divisions and a rapacious ruling elite that has been unable to provide good governance, now faces the specter of new Islamic wave, led not by the older, more mature and accommodating Islamic parties but by neo-Taliban groups. By 1998, Pakistani Taliban groups were banning TV and videos in towns along the *Pashtuns* belt, imposing Sharia Punishments such as stoning and amputation in defiance of the legal system, killing Pakistani Shia and forcing people particularly women to adapt to the Taliban dress code and way of life. Pakistan's support for the Taliban is thus coming back to haunt the country itself, even as Pakistani leasers appear to be oblivious of the challenge continue to support the

²³ Rashid, 2000: 93-94.

Taliban. The Taliban and their supporters present the Muslim world and the West with a new style of Islamic extremism, which rejects all accommodation with Muslim moderation and the West. The Taliban's refusal to compromise with the UN humanitarian agencies or foreign donor countries or to compromise their principles in exchange for international recognition and their rejection of all Muslim ruling elites as corrupt has inflamed the debate in the Muslim world and inspired a younger generation of Islamic militants. The Taliban have given Islamic fundamentalism a new face and a new identity for the next millennium – one that refuses to accept any compromise or political system except their own.²⁴

Here it is pertinent to quote research findings obtained through an anthropological study conducted by Ajmal Khan Kakkar with his major focus on perception of Jihad and terrorism among Taliban. The study was conducted during August 2008-January 2009 in Tehsil Karizat located in Pishin Khanozai district of Balochistan Province of Pakistan. The study yielded a sample of 40 Taliban for conducting in-depth interviews. Half of the selected *talibs* were studying in *Madrassas* and the rest were fighting in the way of God and were practicing *mujahid*²⁵s. According to his research findings, whatever Taliban believe and practice is according to the teachings of Islam. They follow the path of Allah and Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Taliban did not practice ethnic Jihad as Islam does not believe on ethnicity. Jihad is an obligation for all Muslims according to certain conditions and situation. It is not a culturally created phenomenon. Allah says: "*Those who struggle in the way of Allah, Allah opens way for them*" According to the Prophet's saying "*every time thee will be a group standing for the right and will be fighting till the last*". Taliban fighting in Swat and Waziristan are not fighting against their fellow Muslims rather their real enemy is American force and government bodies who intend to destroy Islam. All the respondents said that Jihad is practiced against non-Muslims in case they become threat for Islam but in situations where Islamic government supports such enemies then Jihad must be practiced against them for being part of the wrong side. Regarding suicide attacks in Pakistan they were of the view that it is misapprehension created by Western forces and foreign agencies. Taliban's and the local people are not involved in them as they are committed to maintain peace in their home land. They are against killing civilians who are their Muslim brothers and sisters.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Holy Warriors fighting Jihad or holy war.

²⁶ Unpublished research conducted by Ajmal Khan Kakkar as requirement of his Masters dissertation in Anthropology.

Taliban are peace lovers and they respect human dignity and security. Their only purpose is bringing peace in the world which can only be achieved by implementing Sharia. Most of the *talibs* expressed their infuriation and grievance for being misperceived by the West as well as their own government as terrorists. They clarified their stance by explaining actual nature of *Madrassa*²⁷ education which is meant only to provide religious knowledge to the students so that they can spend their lives according to the teachings of Islam. They complained that it is Western agenda proclaiming *madrassa's* as an incubator for terrorists. One of the respondents said:

Madrassas students are wrongly perceived as terrorists who commit suicide attacks. It is pretty shameful that not only West but some of our own Pakistanis blame us for terrorist activities. They must know that inside madrassa we are not given any training for Jihad. We just study Qur'an and Hadith to understand our religion Islam. We also learn other subjects such as computers, mathematics, understanding of human right, ethics etc. To engage oneself in Jihad does not require any madrassa education as whoever fights in the way of Allah do so to please Allah and for the highness of the religion. Suicide attacks occur all over the world not just in Pakistan. In England, one British national Muslim was captured for committing suicide attack and he did not spend even a single day in madrassa. What made him agree to do so was aggression against American unfair policies. Even so many Americans came to Afghanistan and participated in the Jihad against American forces. So madrassa cannot be blamed as a training institute for terrorists.

Kakkar's research findings reveal positive attitude of respondents towards universal human rights. They were of the opinion that Taliban are the practitioner of Islam which is a religion of humanity. Taliban government protected property, loyalty and respect of all. During their rule, the cultivation of drugs dropped to only 2 percent and now we see that Americans have spent millions of dollars to curb this problem but all their efforts went useless.²⁸

On the issue of female education, research findings suggest that they do accept the significance of both male and female education but they demand for the modest conditions in which education is imparted to females. For boys, they prefer *madrassa* education as it offers both modern and religious knowledge. For girls they recommend gender segregated educational environment where they can learn in *purdah* and where they can protect their chastity.

²⁷ Islamic School.

²⁸ Ibid.

The above mentioned discussion makes it clear that perception is always relative and it is up to us whether we see glass half full or half empty? Talib is meant to be a student and so Taliban are group of people joined together for seeking knowledge. Over the period, the context of the term Taliban and *talibanization* has changed. Now a *talib* and terrorist are considered analogous and *talibanization* is perceived as a movement run by wild criminals who fight to spread terror in the world. While Taliban's deny this false interpretation and say that they struggle to preach Islam and only practice Jihad in order to convert people into pure Muslims. Their objective is right but the way they intend to achieve seems wrong because Islam is not the religion which allows any sort of enforcement and coercion. It is mentioned in the Qur'anic verse (2:256):

"la ikraha fid-din"

There is no compulsion in religion

Rather Islam promotes tolerance and diversity of belief system. Islam teaches that human diversity is a sign of God's mercy and a portent for men of knowledge: It is mentioned in the Qur'anic verse (30:22): *"And of His (God's) signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors"*. It is clear that Allah has not forced anyone to be a true believer. The Qur'an says: *"Say: 'The truth is from your Lord': Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it)."* [18:29] In another verse (11:118) it says: *"If the Lord had willed, He would have made mankind into a single nation..."*

The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was advised not to get disappointed when he was rejected many times. *"And if they deny you, those before them also denied. Their messengers came unto them with clear proofs, and with Psalms and the Scripture giving light."* (Qur'an 35:25) Muhammad (S) duty was only to convey the message: *"If then they turn away, We have not sent you (Muhammad) as a guard over them. Your duty is only to convey (the message)..."* (Qur'an 42:48) In another place, likewise, the Qur'an says, *"And say, 'the truth is from your Lord, so whosoever wants let him believe and whosoever wants let him deny.'" (18:29)*

The clergy should not be a part of politics and they must convey Islam in its true sense. Instead of just highlighting the Jihad with sword, they do need to shift emphasis upon its other forms like Jihad with speech, knowledge and wealth. Islam is a religion of peace and it welcomes diversity and pluralism in both faith and culture. Power and politics should not scapegoat religion. That is the only way to make this world a secure place to live in.

References

- Al-Khattar Aref M, *Religion and Terrorism: An Interfaith Perspective*, Praeger Publishers, USA, 2003.
- Gohari M J, *The Taliban: Ascent to Power*, Oxford University Press, UK, 2001.
- Kakkar Ajmal Khan, *The Perception of Jihad and Terrorism among Taliban*, Unpublished work from an MSc Dissertation submitted to Anthropology Department (QAU), Pakistan, 2009.
- Magnus Ralph H, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid*. Boulder Westview Press, Colorado, 2002.
- Marsden Peter, *The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan*, Deb Books Ltd, London and New York, 2002.
- Rashid Ahmed, *Taliban, Islam and the Great Game Oil*, I. B. Tauris Publishers, London and New York, 2000.
- Ridley Yvonne, *In the Hands of the Taliban*, Robson Books, London, 2001.
- Rodinson Maxime, *Mohammed*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1971.

Abstract

Aneela Sultana

TALIBAN OR TERRORIST? SOME REFLECTIONS ON TALIBAN'S IDEOLOGY

This article reflects religious, political and cultural foundations of Taliban's creed which makes them different in the Islamic world as well as gives them special place in today's international power politics. The main objective of this article is to review Taliban's policies which are manifested frequently in their public statements and general practices. It further explains the influence of tribal customs and traditional Pushtun code of conduct over the establishment of Taliban's movement. An attempt is made to appraise gender policy of Taliban's which dictates strict moral code for both men and women and its repercussions for gender relations. This paper also discusses all those factors which contributed in the rise of *talibanization* in Afghanistan as well as in other parts of the Muslim world. *Madrassa* education is strongly believed to be responsible for designing terrorist minds. This article reveals views of *talibs* (*madrassa* students) regarding the nature of their studies and the way this knowledge is actually applied in the course of their life.

Key words: Taliban, Terrorism, Religion, Politics, Ideology, Tribal Customs

Резиме

Анела Султана

ТАЛИБАН ИЛИ ТЕРОРИСТА? НЕКОЛИКО НАПОМЕНА О ТАЛИБАНСКОЈ ИДЕОЛОГИЈИ

Овај чланак разматра верске, политичке и културне основе талибанског исповедања вере које их издвајају од осталог исламског света и дају им посебно место у данашњој светској политици моћи. Главни задатак овог чланка је да разматри главна убеђења Талибана која се често манифестују у њиховом јавном наступу као и у акцијама које предузимају. Подробније се разматрају утицаји племенских обичаја и традиционалног паштунског кода понашања на оснивање талибанског покрета. Дат је један покушај да се оцени талибанска политика пола, која прописује стриктна морална правила како за мушкарце тако и за жене, као и утицај ове политике на односе међу половима. Овај чланак разматра све оне факторе који су утицали на *талибанизацију* Авганистана, као и осталог дела муслиманског света. Заступа се мишљење да је образовање које се

добија у медресама одговорно за формирање терористичког погледа на свет. Овај чланак открива погледе *талиба* (студенти медреса) што се природе њиховог образовања тиче како и начин на који се ово знање примењује у даљем периоду њиховог живота.

Кључне речи: талибани, тероризам, политика, идеологија, племенски обичаји.