# Salman Taseer Shaheed Remembering a brave heart

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Wednesday January 5, 2011 was one of the darkest days of our times. It spotlighted our history with the ghastly assassination of one of its most bright, brilliant and secular leaders of an age when the country was hounded by vultures of bigotry. As he was known the then as Governor Province of Punjab [Salman Taseer](https://dailytimes.com.pk/532055/shaheed-salman-taseers-9th-death-anniversary-being-observed/) was on a carefree visit to Islamabad Super casually walking around fearlessly despite the fact he had been forewarned of him being targeted by the Taliban or the extremists opposed to his leader martyred Benazir Bhutto.

Just a few days before his horrendous assassination I had met him in London when he walked in my office casually as ever. I protested over his carefree approach when threats were mounting. And more so being Governor of Pakistan’s biggest province he was under rules of business detained adequate protocol that of course included bullet proof automobile for his transport, a security guard and normal care. Being younger to me and having known him for over 30 years, I could take him like an elder to task for his swashbuckling style. I asked him as to why did he not ask for the embassy car to make his movement easy. He put his hand in his front pocket, pulled out London Transport’s Day Pass and said ‘Wajid Bhai, why bother you, when I have London’s whole transport in my pocket. It is much easier to move than a car.’ Having lived in London for Charter Accountancy that he did much more than I had until then, Salman knew what was easier and comfortable. Indeed, I could hardly argue and disagree with him.

Salman’s untimely death was a severe blow to Pakistani politics and especially Pakistan People’s Party’s soon after the dastardly assassination of PPP Chairperson martyred Benazir Bhutto. The vacuum caused by his sad demise was a severe jolt for the Pakistani nation, Pakistan People’s Party, President Asif Ali Zardari and the govevernment of the day. There was no doubt that he was bravest of the brave hearts, courageous and daring–a great man who dared to speak out in defence of blasphemy victim—Aasia Bibi— rotting in jail for years for want of justice from a anorchous judiciary that could dare defend the rights of the people including minorities. Salman Shaheed was totally committed to the high democratic ideals and the secular vision of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and martyred Benazir Bhutto. Had he not been that profoundly committed to justice to minorities he would have had no business to visit Aasia Bibi in her Punjab police dungeon to assure here that soon she would be given amnesty by the President.

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Martyred Salman was held in highest esteem by the people who respected his boldness to proclaim loud and clear that he believed in liberal and secular politics. He was targeted for elimination for having defended the rights of minorities against the black and discriminatory laws introduced by dictator General Ziaul Haq to terrorise the people into submission to his totalitarian rule.

I have had the distinction of knowing him closely for 30 years as an unflinching fighter for democracy and defender of the rights of the people. He not only braved worst persecution and prosecution at the hands of anti-democratic forces in power. My hair raise at their ends whenever I recall how brutally he was tortured by Punjab police when skin peeling rollers were run over his thighs for supporting martyr Benazir Bhutto’s lonh march. At the wishes of the rulers who were true heirs to dictator General Zia, he was executed Gestapo like treatment for his commitment to democracy and secular politics. His tragic demise – a sacrifice in blood — at the critical juncture when Pakistan was carrying on a battle to do or die to defend Islam’s pristine values of compassion, tolerance and equal treatment to all its citizens irrespective of caste, creed, colour or gender, to save the county from becoming a victim to extremism—indeed, carved for him a permanent niche in the hall of fame of those great leaders who preferred death to surrendering to the obscurantist forces immortalising in history.

Besides being a political activists of the highest calibre, in his prime of life he was at the top of his profession as a chartered accountant of international fame, he as well made his mark as a leading entrepreneur and contributed immensely in objective and bold journalism through his newspaper Daily Times, Weekly Friday Times, TV channels Auj Aur Kal and Business Plus.

As a politician he had been a member of the Punjab provincial assembly, suffered long periods of incarceration, braved torture inflicted on him in the dungeon of notorious Lahore’s Old Fort-a hell on earth. The entire nation shall always share the sad memories of Salman Taseer’s assassination, we shall always remember him by rededicating to his high ideals and pledge that his commitment to truth will be the agenda to follow – to pull out extremism from its roots — after all its perpetrators have penetrated deeply into our otherwise peaceful society.

His sacrifice in blood will always be remembered as a land mark in the ongoing battle for survival of Pakistan and to return to the Quiad’s vision. We will have to separate religion from politics-come what may-as a tribute to Bhutto Sahib, martyred Benazir Bhutto and Salman Taseer Shaheed. We must not fear fear as Bibi used to say. We have to fight back anti-Pakistan elements that create and nurture extremists, the politicians and the people in media who support religious extremists and those incite violence from the pulpit as accomplices to extremism. Such elements shall have to be eliminated. This is clearly written on our walls as the need of the hour. If the nation continues to remain complacent and follow a policy of appeasement of running with the hare and hunting with the hound-we will end up sliding down the eddy of doom and disaster. Every one will perish.

Shaheed Salman Taseer, had committed his life to foster secular politics, eradicate extremists and legatees of ruthless dictator General Ziaul Haq. As a brave man and a devout follower of the Quaid, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and martyred Benazir Bhutto — a victim of terrorists and those in power behind them – his warnings were very apt: “Beware of the mullahs. They have to be confronted or they will take over our lives.”

Shaheed Taseer was a trusted associate of martyred Benazir Bhutto. According to leading columnist/author Ahmed Rashed: “Taseer could talk for hours on his favourite subject: the price that Pakistan had paid for jihad and the need to turn back from this “deadly legacy”.

When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto took to challenging the well-entrenched forces of status quo, Salman became his staunch supporter and later after ZAB’s judicial murder he joined his daughter Benazir Bhutto to continue the democratic mission of her father and to save Pakistan from falling into the hands of religious extremists god-fathered by General Zia.

Martyred Benazir Bhutto saw in him a relentless warrior for the right causes, she selected him as PP party’s candidate in 1988 general elections. Taseer won the seat in the Punjab provincial legisl

ature, riding the wave of popularity for the young Benazir Bhutto. Throughout his life he remained a dauntless and fearless follower of Benazir Bhutto and opposed tooth and nail all the anti-democratic forces including General Zia’s “baqiyat” (heirs to Zia’s egacy).

Shaheed Salman made his mark as an outstanding secularist in a country when there were very few who could speak out for fear of intimidating religious extremists. In a Financial Times interview just months before his assassination he insisted – with both pride and defensiveness – that Pakistan would not go the way of Afghanistan. “Pakistan is a vibrant democracy,” he stoutly believed. “It has an educated middle class, a civilian government and a free press.” Many times he was warned that “they were after him”. Always he brushed the death threats aside with contempt. Following Benazir’s footsteps, he preferred to do and die for the cause that was dear to him – secular democracy, empowerment of the poor, women and less privileged. Indeed, after his demise none of his colleagues had that much of dare to speak against obscurantist forces as Chairman Bilawal Bhutto.

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