**The Unleashed Religious Genie**

[Aliya Anjum](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/aliya-anjum/)

May 4, 2023

During the 1980s, General Zia-ul-Haq groomed Pakistan for Jihad. Today, militants stay relevant throughout Kashmir and Palestine.

Our clergy lacks intellectual rigour and even our academia is in a self-induced intellectual coma. Violence, being the path of least resistance – pun not intended – keeps Islamic groups relevant, resourceful and powerful. Their nuisance value has now metastasized into an existential threat to the state.

The enemy is manufactured through Takfir; to create a black-and-white world with an us-versus-them mindset. Takfir paves the way for Jihad.

In every khutba or mosque sermon, every imam labels all non-Muslims – especially Westerners – as kafirs. This strawman argument is very convenient but intellectually dishonest.

The word kafir was first revealed in the Quran in Surah Mudassir (74:10).

The term Kafir is best explained by the intellectual giant Muhammad Asad in his Tafsir. He says: “…..The Qur’anic expression kafir cannot be simply equated to “unbeliever” or “infidel”…….. It must have a wider, more general meaning…… The root verb of the participial noun kafir is kafara, “he covered a thing.” It has a connotation of “concealing” something that exists or “denying” something that is true. Hence a kafir is “one who denies the truth” in the widest, spiritual sense of this latter term.”

A majority of Westerners have huge misconceptions about Islam as they equate Muslims with terrorism and misogyny.

Asad explained the wider implication of Kufr. According to him: “It relates to the existence of God, or to a doctrine in the Divine writ, or to a self-evident moral proposition, or to an acknowledgment of, and therefore gratitude for, favors received.”

Kufr is the refusal to acknowledge the truth. Then exposure to the truth is necessary for its denial. Before 9/11, most Westerners had never heard the word Islam or Muslims. Even today, a majority of Westerners have huge misconceptions about Islam as they equate Muslims with terrorism and misogyny. The message of the Quran has still not reached the West. This is why a majority has not intellectually explored it.

This also holds true for China, Japan, Korea and other East Asian nations, Animistic Africans, Indian Hindus and others. Therefore we cannot label any of them as ones who reject the truth. Calling them Kafirs, is grossly unjust and completely wrong. The correct term is non-Muslim, not kafir.

The next erroneous Takfir is that of fellow Muslims.

The Quran strictly forbids forming sects but not only do Pakistani Muslims classify themselves on sectarian grounds but they declare takfir on all others outside their sect.

The first global sectarian divide is that of Sunni versus Shias. Takfir of the Shia sect is commonplace.

Once the subdivision of Islam starts, then it never ends. This is precisely why Allah strictly forbade forming sects. The main competing sects among Pakistani Sunnis are the Barelvi, Deobandi and Ahle Hadith. There are various other sects and classifications such as that of Hanafi and Shafai etc but they are not as confrontational.

The big wigs of these prominent sects are Mufti Muneeb ur Rehman of the Barelvis; Mufti Taqi Usmani of the Deobandis; Sajid Mir of the Ahle Hadith; and last but not the least Sajid Naqvi of Ahle Tashee or Shias.

The book Husamul Haramain or Husam al Harmain authored by Barelvis, declares Takfir on Deobandis.

The Deobandis have a tit-for-tat response in the form of Nuzhah al-Khawatir written against Ahmed Raza Barelvi, the founder of the Barelvi sect.

Finally, Talaash e Haq is Takhreej – a Takfir – by the Ahle Hadith.

The Tablighi Jamaat is Deobandi and has a significant following among Pakistanis. It’s important to note that it has recently been banned in Saudi Arabia by MBS. The founding of Dawat e Islami by Ilyas Qadri has given the Barelvi sect a new lease on life. Tehreek e Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) is also Barelvi. However, due to cultural differences between the Memons of Karachi and the Punjabis, both Barelvi groups are completely different in their aims, aspirations, methodology and politics.

TTP’s leader Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud studied at Jamia Ahsan-ul-Uloom and Jamia Yaseen ul Quran in Karachi. Both are Deobandi institutions. However, his version of Islam is a hybrid between Deobandism and Pashtoonwali – the ancient Pashtoon tribal code.

The TTP suspects Ahle Hadith of hiding ISIS or Daesh members. The TTP has declared Takfir and Jihad on the state, its institutions, its military and its citizens. They justify terrorism through Takfir.

The Quran clearly says: “O you who have attained to faith! Pay heed unto God, and pay heed unto the Apostle and unto those from among you who have been entrusted with authority; and if you are at variance over any matter, refer it unto God and the Apostle, if you [truly] believe in God and the Last Day. This is the best [for you], and best in the end.” (4:59)

The bone of contention among sects is never the Quran or Sunnah. It is always some teaching of the founder of their group or its current leader. The divides can be bridged if the state intervenes to declare only the Quran and sahih hadith as an approved religious texts for reference – as per the clear directive above from the Quran.

Sectarian labelling must also be banned by the state. Why should Pakistani Muslims name themselves after the Indian cities of Bareilly and Deoband or any other name when Allah SWT Himself named them Muslims?

“He [All?h] named you “Muslims” before [in former scriptures] and in this revelation” (Quran 22:78).

State action would, however, mean that the shop would close down for those who find wealth, power and fame in the business of religion. It would also require hard work on the part of the clergy to reject all deviant teachings in order to start from scratch. Professor Akbar Ahmed, a Pakistani-origin public intellectual concluded in his global research that Muslim exegesis or Tafsir is frozen in the thirteenth century – at the time of the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258.

It is clear that what Pakistani clerics preach, is only deviance and bidah or innovations. Pakistanis are not diligent and industrious hence social inertia is the real obstacle to religious reform.

Prophet Muhammad is recorded to have expressed extreme rebuke to Usama bin Zayd – the son of Zayd bin Harris – when he killed someone despite the person professing his faith in Islam. Usama bin Zayd said: “The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said: ‘Did he profess” There is no god but Allah,’ and even then you killed him? I said: ‘Messenger of Allah, he proclaimed faith out of the fear of the weapon.’ He (pbuh) responded: Did you tear his heart in order to find out whether he had professed or not?’ And he went on repeating it to me till I wished I had embraced Islam that day.” (Sahih Muslim 176)

The Prophet (pbuh) also said: “Faith is that you affirm your faith in Allah; in His angel; in His Books; in His Apostles; in the Day of Judgment; and in the Divine Decree, both good and evil.” (Sahih Muslim 8)

Since all sects claim Islam as their religion and they also profess belief in all of the above, Takfir is illegal. This deviant practice is antithetical to faith and must be banned. Any Takfir motion should be routed to a Muslim state council – which needs to be established. The violent abuse of the blasphemy law must be tackled similarly.

The hijacking of religion for political purposes must be completely subverted through state power. Separatist movements, civil unrest and violent demonstrations by religious groups, jihadi movements, terrorism and militancy cannot be curbed without state action.

*The writer is an independent researcher, author and columnist. She can be reached at aliya1924@gmail.com*