

UNDERSTANDING A CHANGE IN DOCTRINE OF BARELVISM FROM PEACEFUL MOVEMENT TO VIOLENT ACTIVISM: A CASE STUDY OF TLP

Shafiq Qurban*

Wasif Mumtaz**

Abstract

This article examines the different stages of the evolution of religious activism in Pakistan. It studies in detail, the different phases of the Barelvi movement in Pakistan and how it has transformed from a peaceful movement into violent activism. It examines the TLP phenomenon as the latest stage of the Barelvi movement and attempts to deconstruct it for understanding, using the social movement theory lens. It uses primary and secondary data sources including interviews to study the structure of the TLP cadres. Data findings of this article argue that TLP is a phenomenon inside the traditional Barelvi movement and can be seen as a case of lower-class uprising against the elite. The analysis based on the data findings draws upon some key characteristics of the TLP as opposed to the historical Barelvi movement. The analysis identifies that the TLP phenomenon is an urban cum class uprising within the Barelvi hegemonic structure. This is an important factor behind the strong support that TLP enjoys and that has been evident during the elections of 2018 and the various protests carried out by the TLP between 2014 and 2021.

Key Words: Barelvism, Peaceful Movement, Violent Activism, TLP, Security, Shrines

* Assistant Professor, DPSIR, University of Management and Technology, Lahore

** MPhil Researcher, DPSIR, University of Management and Technology, Lahore

Introduction

Pakistan has been at the receiving end of extremism and radicalization since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the consequent Afghan Jihad. The state patronage of the group involved in the Afghan Jihad has had its effects beyond the calculation. However, things went west when, post 9/11, the state of Pakistan aligned with the US and supported the US invasion of Afghanistan against Al-Qaida. This move started the reign of terror in the country with suicide blasts in public places and targeted operations against the armed forces and government officials. It is estimated that Pakistan has incurred economic damages between 35-40 billion USD¹.

In contrast, the government of Pakistan's official numbers state a loss of 150 billion USD in the economy and more than 70,000 human lives.² However, the decisive steps taken by the state of Pakistan in military operations like Zarb e Azb, Rah e Haq, and Rah e Nijat have helped stabilize the country's law-and-order situation. However, Pakistan has faced different kinds of radicalization movements at various times. Some were religious, like TNSM in Swat and TTP in FATA; others were sub-national or ethnic, like MQM in Karachi (the late 80s and early 90s) and the Baluchistan separatist movement. These issues have been kept in the domain of high politics and dealt with politically and militarily.

Yet, one way or the other, Pakistan continues to face radicalization or extreme behaviors by political and religious entities. Rising polarization and declining tolerance levels have always kept the security situation in the country at the edge. On January 4, 2011, Salman Taseer, the Governor of Punjab, was assassinated by his bodyguard because Taseer supported Asia Bibi (a Christian woman accused of blasphemy) and criticized the blasphemy law in Pakistan. This assassination started a new movement in Pakistan, strong enough to close down the entire country and challenge the writ of the state at any time of its convenience. The movement that started for the release of Mumtaz Qadri (Taseer's killer) later changed into Tehreek e Labaik Ya Rasul Allah - TLYR (movement to serve the Prophet Muhammad PBUH) and eventually took the shape of a political party named Tehreek e Labaik Pakistan (TLP).

¹Ali, Arshad. "Economic cost of terrorism: A case study of Pakistan." *Strategic Studies* 30, no. 1 (2010).

² Ahmed, Khurshid. "War on terror has cost Pakistan more than \$150 bn in losses since 9/11". Arab News, Updated on September 12, 2021. Arab News. <https://arab.news/zt78q>

Call it either TLJR or TLP but since its inception, it has collided with the state on seven occasions, starting from 2017 against the change in law of declaration of finality of Prophethood till in 2021 against the French cartoons issue. The range of the problems taken up by TLP has been in the finality of Prophethood and Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) respect. Since TLP's ideological origin falls under the school of Barelvism, the love for the Prophet (PBUH) has been the cornerstone of the entire movement. TLP emerged under the dynamic leadership of Khadim Hussain Rizvi, who used to be a Peshh Imam (prayer leader) in a local mosque in Lahore. Khadim Hussain Rizvi's blunt oratory and his use of solid and insulting adjectives for any he thought was against his ideology have been the significant features of his personality. He is on record for using insults for Tahir ul Qadri, who happens to be a significant Barelvi leader and is known for his Sufi-styled moderate stance.³

TLP contested the general elections in 2018 and mobilized many voters (as many as the fifth most significant votes were cast for TLP). However, these votes were not actualized as they failed to secure any seat in the National Assembly but managed to win two seats in the Sindh Assembly. After 2018, TLP became a political reality in Pakistan and has been active on the streets on various issues.

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature. The research design adopted for this research is a case study that focuses on TLP's rise and its street strength and its ability to function as a pressure group which is an anomaly, keeping in sight the history of the Barelvi movement. Data collection for this research has been done through primary and secondary sources. Primary sources taken into account include official government documents, semi-structured interviews, and intelligence reports. A purposive sampling technique has been used to conduct interviews with TLP senior members and custodians of shrines and renowned Barelvi religious scholars. Secondary sources used for this research were books, academic journal articles, published and broadcasted interviews, speeches, social media content, and newspaper and magazine reports and articles. The Thematic and content analysis is used for analysis using the mix of content and documentary analysis and codification is done by giving preference to words, themes, and concepts relevant to this topic.

Theoretical Framework

Social movement theory focuses on understanding the dynamics and processes of collective action, mobilization, and resistance in society. It provides a framework to explain the emergence and growth of social movements.⁴ Several key concepts within social movement theory can shed light on the emergence of TLP. Social movements often emerge in response to perceived grievances or injustices. TLP's emergence can be understood in terms of grievances related to perceived blasphemy against Islam and disrespect towards religious symbols. The movement mobilized individuals who shared a strong religious identity and a sense of collective threat to their religious beliefs. Social movements are influenced by political opportunities; such as shifts in

³ Basit, Abdul. "Barelvi political activism and religious mobilization in Pakistan: The case of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP)." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 21, no. 3 (2020): 374-389.

⁴ Wiktorowicz, Quintan, ed. *Islamic activism: A social movement theory approach*. Indiana University Press, 2004.

power dynamics or changes in the political environment.⁵TLP capitalized on political opportunities by mobilizing support around religious issues and taking advantage of the country's religious landscape. The movement gained momentum during political transitions and exploited the vacuum left by mainstream political parties on religious matters.

Social movements require effective mobilization structures to coordinate collective action. TLP established a hierarchical organizational structure with a charismatic leader at its helm. This structure facilitated recruitment, mobilization, and coordination of supporters across different regions of Pakistan. TLP capitalized on deep-rooted religious sentiments among sections of the population, particularly those who felt marginalized or ignored by mainstream political parties. Grievances related to religious identity and the protection of Islamic values became a central theme in TLP's mobilization efforts. Social Movement Theory explains that grievances provide the necessary motivation for collective action and can act as a catalyst for mobilization.

Frames are interpretive frameworks that social movements use to make sense of the world, articulate their grievances, and mobilize support. TLP employed religious frames and symbols to construct its narrative and appeal to a wide audience. The movement framed itself as the defender of Islam and the honor of Prophet Muhammad, resonating with individuals who felt a strong religious identity and a need to protect it. By framing their cause in religious terms, TLP successfully attracted followers and garnered support.

Historical Evolution of Religious Activism in Pakistan

1. Advent of Islam in United India

The arrival of Islam in United India is generally associated with the Muslim conquest of United India around 900 CE; however, a detailed study of history has shown signs of trade relations between the Arab peninsula and United India from ancient times. The Muslim traders from the Arab peninsula arrived in United India as per the record in 630 CE. Conquest missions from the Muslim – Arab Empire were sent to United India during the 'Khilafat e Rashida' (rightly guided Caliphate). The influence of Islam on the Jatt tribes in United India is also recorded. However, Muslims celebrate the arrival of Muhammad bin Qasim in Sindh as the advent of Islam in United India around 711 CE. Many Muslim tribes in present-day United India and Pakistan find their ancestry in the army of Muhammad bin Qasim. So, the origin of Islam in United India is unclear, and multiple theories surround the subject.⁶

However, it is evident in the history study that the organized influence of Islam in United India began with the Ghaznavid conquest of United India around 900 CE. Ghaznavid belonged to one of the Turk tribes (dominantly under the influence of the 'Hanafi' school of thought). Mahmud established the Delhi Sultanate (Delhi Empire) in 1200 CE. This began Islam's organized influence in United India under the Hanafi school of thought.⁷

⁵ Klandermans, Bert, and Nonna Mayer. "Right-wing extremism as a social movement." In *Extreme right activists in Europe*, pp. 3-15. Routledge, 2005.

⁶ Schimmel, A. (1980). *Islam in the Indian subcontinent* (Vol. 4). Brill.

⁷ Haghnavaz, Javad. "A brief history of Islam (The spread of Islam)." *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 4, no. 17 (2013).

2. Barelvi Movement in United India

The Barelvi movement is one of the latest mainstream movements in India. It started as a counter-narrative to the Ahl e Hadith and Deobandi movement. It started in the 1880s under the dynamic leadership of Ahmed Raza Khan of Bareilly in the United India. The Barelvi movement was institutionalized in 1905 with the inauguration of the Manzar ul Islam seminary in Bareilly. The Barelvi movement can be cited as the Indian version of Sufi Islam as Barelvi accept the Sufi orders i.e. Qadri, Chishti, Suharwardi, Naqashbandi. As discussed earlier, the movement started as a counter-narrative to the Ahl e Hadith's criticism of Shrine culture and the Order of Saint and Devotee. The movement produced arguments favoring these practices and called themselves Ahl e Sunnah (followers of Sunnah). Barelvis made the love of Prophet Muhammad the cornerstone of their ideology. They revere Prophet Muhammad and the Sufis and ascribe to shrine-based religious practices.⁸

The Barelvi movement became an active socio-political movement when it came openly against Arya Samaj's (a Hindu revivalist organization) Shudhi movement (an attempt to convert Muslims into Hindus or, as they called it, reverting to Hinduism). Ahmed Raza Khan (Ala Hazarat as popularly referred to) and Mufti Naeem ud Din Muradabad played an essential role in leading the counter-movement. After this, the Barelvi movement again played an important role when the issue of Shaheed Ganj Mosque occurred between Muslims and Sikhs. Shaheed Ganj conflict started in 1762 when the Sikhs captured Lahore and built a Gurdwara in the courtyard of a mosque. Sikhs banned the Muslims from entering the facility. The tension continued for almost a century until the annexation of Punjab at the hands of the British in 1849. In 1850, Muslims took the case to the Punjab High Court. However, the case was decided in favor of the Sikhs in 1883. But the tensions tightened when, in 1935, the Sikhs demolished the mosque building. This caused riots in Lahore. At that time, one of the most respected leaders of the Barelvi movement, Peer Jamat Ali Shah, took the lead of the movement and took a procession towards the mosque that was handled by the police by firing upon the protestors.⁹ Peer Jamat Ali Shah and his fellows kept pursuing the case; however, they remained in favor of the Sikhs, but the Shaheed Ganj movement helped the Barelvi movement establish strong roots both in rural and urban parts of India.

3. Barelvi Movement in Pakistan

After 1947, the Barelvi movement once again took the streets. It showed its strength for activism in the 1950s when they started Majlis e Tahafuz e Khatam e Nabuwat (Assembly for safeguarding the finality of Prophethood) against the Ahmadiyya movement of Mirza Ghulam Ahmed of Qadiyan. This assembly (primarily a socio-political pressure group) carried out country-wide protests with all the prominent Barelvi sect leaders (*Pirs* and Clerics) gathered under the banner of Majlis e Tahafuz e Khatam e Nabuwat. This assembly called for a declaration of

⁸ Jackson, William Kesler. "A Subcontinent's Sunni Schism: The Deobandi-Barelvi Rivalry and the Creation of Modern South Asia." (2013).

⁹ Ali, Kausar, and Huang Minxing. "Muslims preaching movements in British-India: An appraisal of the Tablighi Jamaat and its competitors." *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)* 5, no. 1 (2021): 356-371.

Ahmaddiyas as non-Muslim removal of Ahmaddiyas from top governmental posts, including Zafar ullah Khan, then Pakistan's foreign minister. The demands were rejected by the Government, which made the followers of Majlis take to the streets in different parts of the country.¹⁰

The riots of 1953 were one of the most severe ones in the history of Pakistan. As a result of these riots, an estimated figure of 2000 is recorded for those who lost their lives. The civil unrest was of the magnitude that police had to fire straight at the public. Consequently, martial law was imposed in Lahore (historically the first martial law in the country's history, though localized in its nature). It took 70 days to normalize the situation in Lahore. Khawaja Nazim ud Din (Prime Minister) and Mumtaz Daultana (Chief Minister Punjab) both had to go home on the orders of Governor General Ghulam Muhammad. Abdul Sattar Khan Niazi was one the leading political figures (belonging to Awami Muslim League then and later became the President of Jamiat Ulema e Pakistan, a Barelvi political party) who was sentenced to death along with Abul Ala Maududi (founder of Jamat e Islami, a Deobandi leaning political party). An inquiry commission was set up to study the riots and their causes, comprising Justice Munir and Justice M.R. Kiyani. However, The report was as controversial as any other document in Pakistan. Scholars rejected the report, accusing it of being partial. An engaging portion of comments presented in the report are noted by Khan (2011):

Suppose there is one thing that has been conclusively demonstrated in this inquiry. In that case, it is that provided you can persuade the masses to believe that something they are asked to do is religiously right or enjoined by religion, you can set them to any course of action, regardless of all considerations of discipline, loyalty, decency, morality or civic sense.¹¹

The Majlis e Tahafuz e Khatam e Nabuwat was one of the significant movements taken up by the Barelvi sect until the start of the TLP phenomenon in 2014.

In 1974, a bill was tabled in the National Assembly of Pakistan by Shah Ahmed Noorani of Karachi (a Barelvi cleric and politician) and Mufti Mehmood (a Deobandi cleric and opposition leader in the National Assembly) to declare the Ahmadiyya community as non-Muslims. The bill was passed, and Ahmaddiya Jamat was declared non-Muslim. Islamist political groups celebrate this as a significant achievement, but no one sect can claim it alone. All the major Islamist socio-political groups, i.e., JUI (Deobandi), JUP (Barelvi), Jamat e Islami (Hanafi with a tilt towards Deobandi school of thought), were on board about the 2nd Amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan in 1974. Some political parties like Tehreek e Istiqlal (led by Asghar Khan), Pakistan Democratic Party (led by Nawabzada Nasrullah), and Muslim League of Pir Pagara.¹²

¹⁰ Gugler, Thomas K. "Islamization and Barelvis in Pakistan." *Faith-Based Violence and Deobandi Militancy in Pakistan* (2016): 369-397.

¹¹ Khan, Ismail. "The assertion of Barelvi extremism." *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 12 (2011): 51-73.

¹² Paracha, Nadeem F. "The 1974 ouster of the 'heretics': What really happened." *Dawn*, Nov 21 (2013): 2013. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1057427>

Barelvi Movement: Lacking and Grievances

In all its capacity, the Barelvi movement has played an essential role in the struggle for Pakistan and in ensuring grassroots-level support for the All India Muslim League (I. Ahmed, 2014). As a sect, Barelvis has displayed a pacifist attitude as the Sufis' teaching demands looking into one's self somewhat outside. The influence of Sufi tradition on the Barelvi movement has kept the movement overall very peaceful. The devolution of power is a vital characteristic of the movement as each Pir (spiritual leader) has its club of audience that does not look elsewhere. So, a key central figure has been missing for most of the movement.

The *Pirs* (spiritual leaders) have been vital to the political elite, especially after the 1985 non-party-based elections that promoted caste and creed-based constituency politics. Barelvi *Pirs* like Yusuf Raza Gillani (Musa Pak), Shah Mehmood Qureshi (Bahaudin Zikriya), Faisal Saleh Hayyat (Shah Jeevna), Mehboob Sultan (Sultan Bahu) have served at various executive positions in the Government at different times. But the general state patronage has been missing, and instead, the state has adopted an attitude of discrimination. The Barelvi leadership has noted many reservations about this issue. For example, the Deobandi Imams in the mosques of the newly developed societies, especially the ones owned by the Armed Forces.¹³

This attitude is primarily due to the state's patronage of Afghan Jihad and promotion of the Deobandi and Salafi schools of thought to get support from the Arab world. The rising influence of the Deobandi sect was taken into account by some Barelvi groups such as Dawat e Islami (founded in Karachi in 1981, an organization for the promotion of the Barelvi school of thought, and has kept itself away from politics successfully since then) and Sunni Tehreek (founded in Karachi in 1991, has made a political alliance with JUP). However, national-level leadership and an influential pressure group have yet to emerge.

Another grievance that is very strong among the Barelvis is the series of persecutions at the hands of Ahl e Hadith, Deobandi, and Salafi terrorism. Several shrines in Pakistan were attacked by terrorists e.g. Data Darbar in Lahore (*Deadly Blasts Hit Sufi Shrine in Lahore*, 2010), Abdullah Shah Ghazi in Karachi (*Twin Suicide Attacks at Abdullah Shah Ghazi Shrine*, 2010), Rehman Baba, Peshawar (*Pashtun Poet Rehman Baba's Mausoleum Bombed*, 2009), Sehwan Shareef in Sehwan. Barelvi gatherings have also been the target of terrorist activities backed by different groups e.g., Barelvi gathering in Karachi¹⁴ and other parts of Pakistan.¹⁵

¹³ Tanveer, Rana. "Barelvi leader alleges pro-Deobandi bias in Defence Housing Authority". The Express Tribune. (2012). <https://tribune.com.pk/story/348259/barelvi-leader-alleges-pro-deobandi-bias-in-defence-housing-authority>

¹⁴ "Bomb carnage at Karachi prayers". BBC News. April 11, 2006 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4900402.stm

¹⁵ "Sectarian clashes kill seven in Pakistan". The Sydney Morning Herald. February, 17, 2010. <https://www.smh.com.au/world/sectarian-clashes-kill-seven-in-pakistan-20100228-pb2y.html>

TLP Phenomenon

Tehreek e Labaik Pakistan (TLP) is a Barelvi-aligned political party that came to the political stage in 2014. The historical evolution of TLP can be traced back to the assassination of the then Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, in 2011 by his bodyguard in response to Taseer's criticism of blasphemy law¹⁶ in Pakistan in the context of Aasia Bibi.

Mumtaz Qadri, the killer of Salman Taseer, suddenly became the hero of the religious cults, especially the Barelvi-aligned minds, since love for Prophet Muhammad PBUH is at the core of the Barelvi ideology, and the clause of the finality of prophethood is one of the central pillars of the Islam. The general public sentiments of a certain social, religious, and economic class were with Mumtaz Qadri, and they celebrated the killing of the Governor. Even a certain segment of lawyers supported Mumtaz Qadri and Government lawyers refused to prosecute him.¹⁷

Soon, the sympathy towards Mumtaz Qadri turned into a movement that demanded the release of the 'celebrated' Mumtaz Qadri.¹⁸ However, after five years of Taseer's murder, Mumtaz Qadri was sentenced to death and was executed on February 26, 2016.¹⁹ Mumtaz Qadri's hanging and funeral gave the Barelvi movement a new life. As per some reports, Qadri's funeral was attended by more than 100,000 people in Rawalpindi.²⁰

The movement that started for the release of Mumtaz Qadri turned into Tehreek e Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLYR). This Barelvi pressure group kept its focus on the blasphemy cases and laws on blasphemy. The movement got two leaders, both stationed in Lahore, Dr. Ashraf Asif Jalali (a scholar with a hint of modern education carrying the title of Dr. with his name) and Khadim Hussain Rizvi (a scholar and an Imam of a local mosque in Lahore). Initially, both of them were leaders of the TLYR until, in 2017, a split occurred between them on an issue about the Faizabad sit-in (a countrywide strike called in by the TLYR against some changes in the language of an election law of 2017 that was taken as an attack on the finality of prophethood). Khadim Hussain Rizvi was in Rawalpindi, while Ashraf Asif Jalali was in Lahore, leading TLYR. However, Khadim Hussain Rizvi and his companions agreed with the government (when the government accepted their demand) and called the protest off. Dr. Jalali, who was in Lahore, took

¹⁶ Choudary, Hassan. "Taseer's remarks about blasphemy law." The Express Tribune. January 4, 2011. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/99277/taseers-remarksabout-blasphemy-law>

¹⁷ Asad, Malik. "Govt lawyers were not ready to prosecute Mumtaz Qadri". Dawn, January 25, 2015. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1159330>

¹⁸ AFP. "Bid to free Malik Mumtaz Qadri rejected". Dawn. January 20, 2011. <https://www.dawn.com/2011/01/20/bid-to-free-malik-mumtaz-qadri-rejected/>

¹⁹ "Pakistan hangs Mumtaz Qadri for the murder of Salman Taseer". February, 16, 2016. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/2/29/pakistan-hangs-mumtaz-qadri-for-murder-of-salman-taseer>

²⁰ Shah, Saeed & Qasim Nauman. Pakistanis Throng Funeral of Man Hanged for Killing Critic of Blasphemy Laws. *Wall Street Journal*. 2021. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/pakistanis-throng-for-funeral-of-man-hanged-for-killing-critic-of-blasphemy-laws-145685568>

this as a betrayal and continued the protest. A list of accusations was also made in a TV talk show by Dr. Jalali against Khadim Rizvi.²¹

This started a rift in TLJR and later that year Khadim Hussain Rizvi announced the political faction of TLJR in Karachi named Tehreek e Labaik Pakistan (TLP) and announced to contest the elections of 2018. The religio-political activism of the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) has successfully challenged the state's writ on as process, the bedrock of governance. The handling of The TLP issue has permanently been assigned to the realm of high politics. On a deeper level, its phenomenal rise signifies an increasing threshold of religious extremism in Pakistan, but on another level, it does explain the failure of law enforcement.²² The party activists have experienced violent faceoffs with law enforcement agencies as many as seven times, the latest being in November 2021. Issues taken up by TLP range from protecting the Blasphemy laws in Pakistan vis-à-vis the acquittal of Asia Bibi from a blasphemy case, the ouster of the French Ambassador from Pakistan, and severing all ties with France.

Decoding the Rise of TLP

Since the issue of TLP has been shifted to higher politics, several attempts have been made by political analysts and social scientists to decode the TLP phenomenon. However, only a little literature has been produced on the topic. The following passage will briefly note different works that have been done on the topic and the approaches taken by them to understand the dramatic rise of TLP and the adequate street power it enjoys. A significant portion of the literature views the rise of TLP through the lens of radicalization and terrorism.²³

The sensitivity of the issue of blasphemy has made the LEA reluctant to take action against the public agitation done by TLP, very similar to the attitude the Fatwa issued against the Pakistan army during the counter-terrorism operation in Wana that impacted the soldiers' will to fight.²⁴

Roohan Ahmed (2022) also sees the TLP phenomenon as a new wave of extremism and radicalism. Ahmed (2022) identifies two critical reasons for the rise of TLP and its assertive street power. Firstly, the grievances among Bareilvis against the Deobandi extremism directed towards them and the State patronage they enjoyed due to Afghan Jihad and then sudden patronage towards Sufi Islam to counter the Taliban threat post 9-11.

²¹ Sabat, Ahmad, Muhammad Shoaib, and Abdul Qadar. "Religious populism in Pakistani Punjab: How Khadim Rizvi's Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan emerged." *International Area Studies Review* 23, no. 4 (2020): 365-381.

²² Yilmaz, Ihsan, and Kainat Shakil. "Religious populism and vigilantism: The case of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan." (2022).

²³ Ahmad, Maheen. "Rise of Bareilvi Extremism: Policy Options for Pakistan." *Islamabad Policy Research Institute* (2021). <https://ipripak.org/2021/06/07/rise-of-bareilvi-extremism-policy-options-for-pakistan/>

²⁴ "2004 religious ruling: Lal Masjid had declared soldiers as 'not martyrs'." *The Express Tribune* November 14, 2013. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/631811/2004-religious-ruling-lal-masjid-had-declared-soldiers-as-not-martyrs>

Secondly, the charismatic personality of Khadim Hussain Rizvi has been an essential factor in mobilizing people under the TLP banner. Ahmed (2022) quotes Sabookh Syed:

...Khadim Hussain Rizvi had "a charismatic personality and an aggressive unique style of delivering sermons that made him the center of attraction." Without these skills, many believed that the TLP might lose its ability to sustain the attention of its millions of followers and become less of a problem for Pakistan's political and military elites.²⁵

Ahmed (2022) also notes a possible implication of this new wave of radicalization:

The group's ideology may also challenge Pakistan's military, mainly because the TLP is growing in influence in regions that provide a significant number of recruits. The growing influence of radical Barelvi ideology could create long-term institutional challenges for Pakistan's armed forces, leading to a growing ideological divide between an increasingly conservative lower cadre and senior commanders with a different ideological leaning. Such an outcome, while highly unlikely, could have far-reaching consequences.²⁶

Shahid (2018) notes the anti-Ahmaddiya sentiment as a factor that played a role in TLP's appeal to the masses. He adds that it could help them in building a robust electoral discourse. Shahid (2018) notes:

The TLP is hoping that the prevailing anti-Ahmadi sentiment in the country will propel the party towards more significant electoral gains. The party has also found sympathizers in local media houses, which helps the group spread its ideology, with any dissenting voices censored or threatened.

Shahid (2018) also quotes the TLP spokesperson about the stance of the Ahmadiyya community regarding the Atif Mian controversy:

"Ahmadis should accept that they are non-Muslims and know their place," he continues. "There are so many Christians and Hindus who are in official positions – how many have we protested against? [Rana] Bhagwandas was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Nobody protested against him, because he was honest about the fact that he's a Hindu and did not deceive anyone."²⁷

Maheen Ahmad in her policy brief titled *Rise of Barelvi Extremism: Policy Options for Pakistan* (2021) identifies three factors that contributed to the street power of TLP. She notes:

²⁵ Ahmed, Roohan. "Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan: An emerging right-wing threat to Pakistan's democracy." *Atlantic Council* (2022).

²⁶ Ahmed, Roohan. "Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan: An emerging right-wing threat to Pakistan's democracy." *Atlantic Council* (2022).

²⁷ K.K. Shahid. "The Rise of TLP". The Newline. October, 2023.

Broadly, three factors contribute to the street activism of some of the Barelvi groups. Firstly, Barelvi groups have complained they were sidelined in the past and wanted to reclaim political space, commensurate with their societal role. One of their reported grievances has been that the Deobandi school of thought received state patronage during the Ziaul-Haq era. Secondly, Barelvi groups have repeatedly contended that they are frustrated that their community and places of worship are frequent targets of attack by extremist Sunni groups like Lashkar e Jhangvi. According to them, a more extraordinary show of strength is intended to enhance the security of Barelvi followers. Thirdly, as Barelvi Islam attaches central importance to the veneration of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), it owns a deep-seated sense of obligation to defend the Prophet (PBUH), which can, in turn, sometimes lead to over-zealous, even violent behavior.²⁸

The work also points towards an important and rarely explored factor in the literature that studies the TLP movement, i.e., the principal street support gathered by the TLP is from the lower-income group of the society. This factor has yet to be catered to in other literature available and is an important missing link in understanding the TLP phenomenon.²⁹

One of the key themes that emerged during the data collection and especially during the interviews conducted within the inner circles of TLP was a sense of disappointment against the *Gadi-Nasheens* (custodians of the shrines). A senior member of TLP during the interview was explicit about the disappointment they feel because their interests are never projected and protected at the governmental level since most representatives of the Barelvi sects are *Pirs* (spiritual leaders) or *Gadi-Nasheens* (custodians of the shrines). They have configured themselves in an elite alliance at the top level.³⁰ This claim can be supported by the facts that most *Gadi-Nasheens* and *Pirs* use their influence in their constituencies either to get votes for themselves, like Yousaf Raza Gillani (former Prime Minister of Pakistan) or Shah Mehmood Qureshi (former Minister of Foreign Affairs) or to get votes for other candidates, for example, a famous shrine of Sial Shareef (district Sargodha) campaigned for Ghulam Bibi Bharwana contesting an election in district Jhang. This support of Sial Shareef helped Ghulam Bibi secure a seat in the National Assembly.³¹

Another member of TLP views the changing dynamics of the Sufi-devotee relationship as the fundamental motivation behind the support enjoyed by TLP. Traditionally, Sufi Pir was a spiritual leader whose aim was to influence the devotee's life so that his life in the world is selfless. His afterlife is heavenly; now, the relations have transformed into a patron-client relation where the Pir offers his lineage or spiritual positioning, and the client 'pays (literally and figuratively) to get benefits. These changing dynamics have pushed the lower middle-class Barelvi towards an

²⁸ Ahmad, Maheen. "Rise of Barelvi Extremism: Policy Options for Pakistan." *Islamabad Policy Research Institute* (2021). <https://ipripak.org/2021/06/07/rise-of-barelvi-extremism-policy-options-for-pakistan/>

²⁹ Yilmaz, Ihsan, and Kainat Shakil. "Religious populism and vigilantism: The case of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan." (2022).

³⁰ Interviewee C. *Interview D - Custodian of a Shrine* Wasif Ali, March 13, 2023

³¹ Khan, Muhammad Yasir Ali, and Muhammad Shafique. "Establishing Alternate Authority: Ghulam Bibi Bharwana's Electoral Campaign 2018."

internal uprising against the hegemonic structure of Barelvism. However, this is a silent and unstructured transformation in the Barelvis.³²

Another aspect of this behavioral transformation within Barelvi that has enabled TLP to gather a massive street strength is the changing urban and rural balance. Traditionally, Barelvis had a stronghold in the rural societies, whereas the urban societies dominated Deobandis. However, educational and economic factors have catalyzed the migration from rural areas to urban centers. As mentioned earlier, this rise in urban population shifted the traditional Deobandi – Barelvi stratification. This has helped TLP mobilize the urban lower middle class from the Barelvi school of thought.³³ This is an important factor that has been missed by the analysts who have attempted to study the rise of TLP and its massive support among the public.³⁴

To triangulate the claims made above, an attempt was made to consult some government documents, especially those submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) by the candidates of TLP in the general elections of 2018. TLP could bag only three provincial seats (2 general and one reserved seat) in the Sindh assembly; otherwise, they could not materialize the voting strength they enjoyed³⁵. TLP emerged as the fifth-highest vote-getting party in 2019, with 2,234,316 votes cast in their favor for the National Assembly. In Sindh, TLP secured two seats with 452,109 votes cast to its name and was ranked the 5th largest votes-securing party.

Scrutiny of the documents of assets and liabilities submitted by the TLP candidates for the seats of Sindh Assembly revealed some facts about the candidates' backgrounds, occupations, and net worth. These documents helped form an analysis of the elemental composition of TLP's cadre. TLP contested elections on 67 seats in Sindh, all from the urban side. 2 seats were won from Karachi (south and west). One of the two candidates that won had 80 yards' house (approx. 2.7 marlas) and a total cash and kind asset value of around 2.3 million rupees only. The second one had 3 million rupees to his name, and the reserved seat woman nominee had zero assets to her name as per Form B (assets and liability form) submitted for the candidature.

Apart from these 3 TLP members elected to the provincial assembly's house, the other candidates also showed a similar trend. The Form B of the nomination paper revealed that most candidates who contested the elections belonged to the lower middle class. Most of the candidates who submitted papers from Sindh were Paish Imams (prayer leaders) or Teachers (either in school or a seminary).³⁶ A few were found to be small-scale traders/business people, real estate agents,

³² Interviewee A. *Senior member of TLP* by Wasif Ali, February 22, 2023.

³³ Interviewee C. *Interview D - Custodian of a Shrine* Wasif Ali, March 13, 2023.

³⁴ MAṬOI, Ecaterina. "Tehreek-E-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP): A Rising Extremist Force, or Just the Tip of a Larger Radicalised Iceberg in the AfPak Region." *Scientific Research and Education in the Air Force—AFASES* (2021): 203-222.

³⁵ Election Commission of Pakistan. "Form B - Assets and Liability form". ECP, Pakistan.2018

³⁶ Election Commission of Pakistan. "Form B - Assets and Liability form". ECP, Pakistan.2018

teachers of the Holy Quran (those who usually go door to door), or had private jobs. Most of the candidates had no houses.³⁷

Another trend noted among the candidates was that most did not own their houses (ECP, 2018). This can be explained by the fact that it is a trend in Karachi that the middle class does not usually buy houses but invests in some businesses and resides in rented houses. However, most of the candidates who did not list a house in their assets also did not list any investment as well in the form. Examination of the Form Bs also showed that most candidates have never been out of Pakistan except for Umrah or Hajj. The common belonging of the majority (almost all of the candidates) was in the form of Gold, which also varied between 1 to 15 tolas. Most candidates owned motorcycles (approximately five years old and of Chinese brand), and very few of them owned cars, but those who did own cars had them leased from the bank.

TLP as a Challenge to the Traditional Barelvi Movement

This data collected and analyzed has shown specific trends that, when analyzed with the interviews, bring out a picture that gives a different understanding of the TLP phenomenon. In light of the available data, some key themes can characterize the rise of TLP. Firstly, TLP is more of an urban phenomenon, differentiating it from the traditional Barelvi movement that has its basis in rural areas. Secondly, the rise of TLP is a class phenomenon. It is more of a lower-middle and middle-class Barelvi movement with more Imam Masjids (prayer leaders of local mosques) and their circle of influence rather than the influential *Pirs* and *Gadi-Nasheens*. Khadim Hussain Rizvi, the sole leader of TLP to whom people responded, was a Paish Imam (prayer leader) in a local mosque of Lahore and had no solid politico-religious background. Lastly and importantly, the TLP is more of a rise of Barelvi of lower socio-financial class against the Barelvi hegemonic structure. On the face of it, the issues of the blasphemy law and the finality of Prophethood were the core agendas of TLP, but that is because it is the cornerstone of the Barelvi movement. Eventually, the rise of TLP is an exhibition of frustration by the Barelvi masses against their traditional representatives (*Pirs* and *Gadi-Nasheens*) who have not been able to address the concerns of their people and, importantly, their sect.

TLP and Securitization

The Copenhagen School developed the securitization concept as a theory to study how specific issues are made security issues and are taken up to higher political zones where they are not open for public debate and are allocated all possible resources without checks (Nyman, 2018). Copenhagen school pointed out that an actor (leader or the head of government in most cases and non-state actors like unions and NGOs in few cases) points out an issue and presents it via 'speech act' as an existential threat to the state's (referent object) values (territorial or ideological) (Nyman, 2018). Suppose this is accepted by the audience (political and military elite precisely and masses in general). In that case, a securitization phenomenon has taken place. The issue then enters a higher political zone where it escapes the normal political sphere and its limitations (debate, audit,

³⁷ Ijaz, Kashif, and Asia Saif Alvi. "Evaluation of Tehreek-E-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) In The Context Of Elitism." *Journal of Positive School Psychology* (2023): 2000-2011.

and general discussions). Paris School took this forward and pointed out that securitization can occur without the speech act through routine acts by law enforcement agencies such as police, army, and paramilitary forces.³⁸

Orthodox religiosity dominating the socio-political scenario may not be new in Pakistan, but TLP is like no other. It is new and prevalent as well. In the past, the most right-wing religious parties were Deobandi in their sectarian identity, and Barelvi was very inactive with few exceptions. However, TLP, Barelvi's dominant right-wing party, has left all others behind regarding street power and even electoral popularity. In the 2018 election, TLP received the third highest number of votes, though their representation in the assembly could be much higher. It is essential to see the phenomenon of the rise of TLP and how they have used the securitization framework in this manner.³⁹

In 2021, the State of Pakistan faced a very tough challenge. TLP, a right-wing religious activist party turned political, called for a country-wide protest and brought the country to a halt. TLP's rise is relatively new. It started after the murder of the then Governor Punjab Salman Taseer in 2011 by his bodyguard. After the arrest of the bodyguard, few voices rose in favor, and the TLP chief's voice was one of them. TLP gained its real fame at the funeral of Mumtaz Qadri (murderer of Salman Taseer). This funeral was not ordinary; it was massive and led by Khadim Hussain Rizvi, the founder of TLP. TLP then marched to Islamabad in a protest against the Election bill controversy, which did not include the article 'Khatam e Nabuwat' (Seal of Prophethood). TLP took the country by storm; they marched from Lahore to Islamabad and stayed at Islamabad for many days, keeping the State capital hostage. TLP once again came to the limelight when the court released a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, who was blamed for committing blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) because of no evidence for charges against her⁴⁰. One of the prominent leaders of TLP even demanded the execution of the judges who gave the decision in the Asia Bibi case. The next part details the October 2021 crisis created by TLP and the gaps at the end of the Law Enforcement Agencies due to securitization.

Rally in Lahore into a sit-in to pressure the government to implement the earlier April 2021 - agreement terms. After Jumrah prayers at Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Mosque, Multan Road, Lahore, the TLP formed into a procession with the express purpose of a protest march towards Islamabad.

As a pre-emptive measure, the provincial authorities blocked crucial points, suspended internet services at select points in Lahore, and deployed the contingents of the Anti-Riot police. Initially, police also arrested over 110 activists of TLP.

On the evening of October 31, 2021, Shah Mehmood Qureshi (Not as Foreign Minister of Pakistan but a Gaddi Nashin of the biggest Gaddi of Pakistan ie Hazrat Bahauddin Zikrya) reached Lahore on a particular aircraft along with Saad Rizvi (leader TLP) for a new round of talks. A

³⁸ Nyman, Jonna. "Securitization." In *Security Studies*, pp. 115-130. Routledge, 2023.

³⁹ Zahid, Zahid Mehmood, Tahir Abbas Sial, and Hamza Ali Rana. "Religious Populism in Pakistan: A Case Study of Tahreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan." *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 5, no. 3 (2022).

⁴⁰ Kakar, Muhammad Sadiq. "Dissecting the Asia Bibi Case: A Critical Analysis of Blasphemy Law in Pakistan." *J. Int'l L. Islamic L.* 18 (2022): 66.

steering committee comprising Ali Muhammad Khan (Federal Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs) and Allama Ghulam Ghaus (representative of TLP) to evaluate the progress of the talks. The agenda points of the committee included a review for removal of 700 members of TLP from the 4th Schedule List, release of its detained activists and Saad Rizvi through court, prosecution of those TLP activists involved in the acts of killing and arson, the proscription of the organization and unfreezing the accounts of TLP activists.⁴¹

On many occasions, TLP's Chief Khadim Hussain Rizvi presented the issue of Namooos e Risalat to a large audience and highlighted its importance for every Muslim, his beliefs, and his life after death. The audience reciprocated this belief because everyone who is a Muslim holds Prophet Muhammad PBUH close to his heart more than anything. TLP used this issue to contest the election, and 'Labaik Ya Rasullah' (at your service, O Prophet) was their official slogan in the elections. This is a fine example of a non-government entity raising an issue and presenting it as a matter of existential importance for the State (Islamic Republic of Pakistan), its values, and the beliefs of Muslims.⁴² At the same time, the audience reciprocates the issue and its importance with the same enthusiasm. It is also essential to see the audience in this case. It consisted of the masses with people from all walks of life, social classes, and even different sects. It also included the country's elite with many political leaders, majorly from the opposition but few from the government.⁴³ TLP found its sympathizers in the Judiciary (referring to the picture of a judge of Islamabad High Court kissing Mumtaz Qadri), in civil bureaucracy, and even in military personals (about the video of Army men responding to the slogans of 'Labaik' during a protest in 2021).

Consequences of TLP's Rise

The emergence of the TLP has resulted in greater socioeconomic divisions in Pakistan, which in turn has led to increased sectarian tensions and acts of violence. The movement's confrontational strategy, which includes holding street protests, putting up blockades, and getting into violent fights with security officials, has caused problems in public life and made people worry about the region's ability to keep itself safe. Violence against people or groups who are seen as immoral has been on the rise, which has added to the divisions that have been growing in society.

The TLP has become a more prominent extremist group because of its aggressive strategies and tendency for violence. The TLP has gained notoriety for its ability to disrupt protests, the blocking of key thoroughfares, and acts of vandalism. This not only increases its credibility with its core constituency but also generates widespread unease and compels authorities to address its demands.

The extremist ideology espoused by TLP poses a risk to Pakistan's efforts to build a society that is more just and free. The organization undermines the legitimacy of the state's authority by

⁴¹ Basit, Abdul. "Barelvi political activism and religious mobilization in Pakistan: The case of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP)." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 21, no. 3 (2020): 374-389.

⁴² Javid, Hassan. "The limits of possibilities of religious politics: The case of the Tehreek-i-Labbaik in Pakistani Punjab." *Sociological Bulletin* 70, no. 4 (2021): 502-521.

⁴³ Basit, Abdul. "Barelvi political activism and religious mobilization in Pakistan: The case of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP)." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 21, no. 3 (2020): 374-389.

interfering with the functioning of the state's institutions and using coercion to achieve its objectives. The ineffectiveness of the government in meeting the demands of the TLP has contributed to an increase in the level of concern regarding law and order. The attention that has been accorded to the activities of the TLP has been detrimental to Pakistan's reputation and has fueled fears of religious extremism all over the world. If the government is unable to rein in extremist groups within the country, it may have a severe influence not just on international investment and trade, but also on international collaboration.

Conclusion

TLP has been a phenomenon that has transformed the dynamics of the traditional Bareilvi movement. TLP, since its rise, has offered a solid resistance to sitting governments, be it PML-N or PTI. It has emerged as a religio-political entity that enjoys strong street support and can generate country-wide protests and blockades, especially in urban centers. TLP used this issue to contest the election and 'Labaik Ya Rasullah' (at your service O Prophet PBUH) was their official slogan in the elections. This is a fine example of a non-government entity raising an issue and presenting it as a matter of existential importance for the State (Islamic Republic of Pakistan), its values, and the beliefs of Muslims. While the audience reciprocates back to the issue and its importance with the same enthusiasm. It is also important to see the audience consisted of the masses with people from all walks of life, social classes, and from different sects. It also included the elite of the country with many political leaders, majorly from the opposition but few from the government. TLP found its sympathizers in the Judiciary (referring to the picture of a judge of Islamabad High Court kissing Mumtaz Qadri), in civil bureaucracy, and even in military personals (about the video of Army men responding to the slogans of 'Labaik' during a protest in 2021).

So, the rise of TLP is a fine but rare example of securitization, and that too very much successful for now. Since securitization is mostly done by the head of governments or military leadership, but in this case a non-state actor (TLP) did use the framework of securitization and succeeded in taking the issue of Namoos e Risalat into a higher political sphere, where no dialogue is possible, no debate or audit is even possible for the actions. The expansion of TLP has significant repercussions for societal cohesion, democratic institutions in Pakistan, and Pakistan's standing on the international scene. It will take an approach with multiple components to solve this problem thoroughly and successfully. This strategy ought to involve effective governance, religious tolerance, the fighting of extremist narratives, and participation in debate to foster understanding and harmony within society. These are the only paths that Pakistan can take going ahead if it wishes to stop the further spread of extremism and establish a future in which everyone has the opportunity to prosper.