

Peace and National Development through Religious Harmony: Building Moderate Networks of Salafism

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Abstract

Salafism rose in eighteenth century as a reform movement which outrightly repudiated the assimilative character of regional Islams and advocated puritanical version of Islam. In his quest to establish political Islamism dogmatic Salafism caused violence as the apparatus of Salafism vehemently stood averse to the idea of cultural integration of Muslims and non-Muslims. The reformative vigour it preached is persistently threatening the peace in various parts of the world. To mend ideological callousness and enable mutual existence Salafism needs to be reoriented as to suit the emerging needs of Muslims communities. The idea of Salafism being at loggerheads with contemporary political systems and national constructs practically hinders the growth potential of Muslim communities. This article is an attempt to study Salafism in detail to suggest possible ways to present a moderate version of Salafism abjuring violence while taking up reform Ist missionary activities in more peaceful ways. Exhaustive discussion of how moderate Salafism can render positive contribution to the national development has been discusses at length.

Introduction

The world is passing through very turbulent times. The global economic crisis continues to manifest in newer and graver dangers almost every week. The similarities to the period just before the Second World War continue to be cited and it seems clear that events are moving the world at an unprecedented pace towards a horrific third world war. Religion has become an important topic on today's policy agenda and global concern. Strategists and policy makers are no longer able to ignore the role of religion in conflict and peace. New researches have amply proved the critical role of religion in conflict prevention and peace building. Although religion is always blamed for inciting conflict and religious tensions obstructing the smooth growth of nation can also be used to resolve conflict and enhance peace initiatives. In different capacities, faith based actors have successfully contributed to peace building process.

This article has been classified into two parts. First part deals with role of religion in peace building and conflict resolution along with detailed innovative strategies employed by various players in this regard.

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Religious engagement and dialogues make the social fabric healthy and firm. After explaining in detail the ideological structures of religious belief, the second part discusses the Salafism, one of the world's most radical fundamental religious sect among Muslim community. Ideological motives for violence, textual literalism, various threats posed by Salafi creed and the mechanism to counter the fanatical menace finds detailed mention in the work.

Part One

Resurging positive role of religion

In the modern era, where science holds considerable sway over the conduct of people, religion and spirituality still occupy prominent role in human life. Driven by the philosophical and methodical tradition of Enlightenment religion was viewed as irrational and unquantifiable phenomenon that cannot be studied from the point of view of reason and expected the importance of the religion to recede as modernization and science triumph. In the backdrop of French revolution and the commencement of European modernity religion was identified as a perennial cause of social destabilization and easy tool to demonize 'the other'.¹ In the past when religions were blended with the political ambition of the rulers, religious institutions inadvertently assumed the gory face of retrogression and institutionalized violence against the demonized other. Social reforms of 18th and 19th century advocated the rigid separation of religion from state affairs given that religion was the fountain of conflict and solution is impossible from the same source.² In contemporary age, tangible nuances are conspicuous in the way people approach religion in various parts of the world, especially Asia and Africa, because spiritual quest of the people is completely unattended by the alternative scientific religion.

Religion has double edge function. From time immemorial religion has the inherent potential of mass mobilization on shared collective identity. If this character was channelized into positive construction, religions would possess immense strength for social cohesion and a boon to progress and national development whereas its negative summoning would open the Pandora's Box of violence and conflicts. Reformist movements persistently eschewed the

¹ Swidler , Leonard (ed.). *Muslims in Dialogue: The Evolution of a Dialogue over a Generation* . Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press , 1992 . p. 32

² Swidler , Leonard . *After the Absolute: The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection* . Fortress Press , 2000 . pp. 54-65

role of religions and faith based organization in order to preclude spates of ethno religious violence promoted by fanatic clergy and cunning politicians who sought legitimacy for their corrupt practices in their mass religious appeal.

Conceptual framework regarding the conflict resolution mechanisms have been largely modified to consider religion and faith groups sine qua non to address the recurring world problems from violence to lumping economic growth.³ Strategies to prevent violence have been generously extended to incorporate religious institutions and appreciated the untapped strengths of religions to maintain social and sustainable development. Kofi Annan, former general secretary of United Nations Organization in a speech made to over a thousand religious leaders who had gathered for the Millennium Peace Summit of World Religious and Spiritual Leaders emphasized the importance of religious agency in allaying specific problems like violence, poverty and environmental concerns.

“In the past religions have been yoked into nationalism, stocking the violent flames of conflicts and setting group against group. In the new globalization era, religious humanism needs to play a bigger role to end the culture of violence through reconciliatory strategies and active engagement.”⁴

Dealing with differences: process for dialogue and active engagement

According to Diana Eck what motivates religious violence are ardent beliefs in exclusive truth, stern textual reading of scriptures, unflinching missionary zeal for conversion, political ambitions of religions and outdated laws and that consider the matters through the middle age etiquette and taboos.⁵ Peaceful religious traditions would turn into worst beasts of destruction and communal hatred when political motivations are fortified with fanatic world view that makes one pitch one against another. Attempts by Hindutva forces to grab political power in India using Hinduism spoilt the religious harmony in the democratic nation by sowing seeds of mistrust and orchestrating communal violence. Likewise, the aspiration to form a Caliphate for Muslims continues to breed problems of religious tension in Iraq and Syria guided by misquoted venomous Salafi ideology of ISIS. Thus problem is

³ Abu-Nimer, Mohammed. *Dialogue, Change, Conflict Resolution and Change: Arab-Jewish Encounters in Israel*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999. p. 114

⁴ United Nations Information Service. Press Release No: UNIS/SG/2639 (August 30, 2000) <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2000/sg2639.html> (accessed January 17, 2017).

⁵ Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How A “Christian Country” Became the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, 2001, HarperSanFrancisco, pp-17-27

not religion itself but radical interpretations and the exclusivist views of adherents are to blame signifying the fact that religion identity could be tapped into far effective peace advocacy tool.⁶

A lion's share of conflicts today are identity conflicts in which identity is defined according to ethno-religious lines like Buddhist Sinhala people of Sri Lanka and Yazidi Christians of Iraq. Religious traditions are used to incite and justify violence demonizing the 'other'. As explained by Johan Galtung, religious, ideological or linguistic symbols that legitimize direct or structural violence contribute to the continuation of the conflicts by systematic traditional teaching and preaching. Religious affiliations along with ethnic bonds often help to create the core of one's identity.⁷ When religion is practiced collectively or in congregation religion becomes the part and parcel of collective identity of society that governs their everyday life. Hence religious feelings embedded in the collective identity of society can mobilize people more powerfully than any other identities of linguistics, nationalism, regionalism and political inclinations. Due to this unique strength to mobilize people easily towards spiritual and political goals, religious traditions have often been abused to legitimize violence, define exclusive identity and perpetuate particular ethnic and national objectives. To sum up, according to Swindler, religions are moderate, harmonious and peaceful in creed but turn into violent institutions in practice due to the wrong strategies applied to interpret the religion or external influences have corrupted the fundamental concepts of religion heralding great human values. In the aftermath of religions being hijacked by bigot elements, religious traditions were robbed of the civilizational responsibility to accentuate peace through mutual coexistence and inclusive active engagements. Bagdad civilization under the Abbasid rulers of middle age that produced painstaking contribution to various fields of knowledge and scientific innovations and the transmission of Greek knowledge through voluminous translations is the great example for the fact that if religious traditions are brought in harmonious cooperation human resources could be used to the optimal level.⁸

⁶ Abu-Nimer, Mohammed. "The Miracles of Transformation Through Interfaith Dialogue: Are you a Believer?" in *Interfaith Dialogue and Peace building*, ed. David R. Smock. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002, p. 224

⁷ Galtung, Johan. "Violence, Peace and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6 (3) (1996): 167 – 191.

⁸ Armstrong, Karen, *A Short History of Islam*, OUP, PP-95-103

Many scholars of terrorism and national security have widely appreciated the role of religion in guaranteeing peace and harmony. Pluralistic aspects of religious traditions need to be cultivated among adherents to enable them to contribute to the national development through mutual collaboration. Religiously motivated non-violence and pluralism are the real panacea to various problems plaguing the world. Religious emotions and affiliations if exploited to mobilize people into harmonious life and cultural assimilations it would be the best tool conducive to diminish scourges of ethnic violence and bloody militancy.

Intra and interfaith dialogues

Intra and inter faith dialogues and engagements cashing on convergent commonalities could somewhat ease the process of national integrity and peace building. Interfaith dialogues are defined as whole host of activities and strategies of intervention designed to bring about a state of peaceful relations by conflicting parties, peace building is a complex and dynamic process of changing relationships, perceptions and underlying elements that perpetuate violence. It also implies to strategies that can prevent conflict, terminate it, transform or resolve. Changing behaviors and perceptions of religious conduct is a critical part of peace building. David Little and Scot Appleby explained peace building through religious advocacy in terms of myriad of activities performed by religious actors for the purpose of mitigating and transforming of trust deficit and violence falsely sponsored by religious beliefs and supplanting xenophobic and chauvinistic religious conduct with harmonious pluralistic way of life enabling to bridge the yawning communal gap. Religious peace building entails faith based actors and religious resources such as myths, values and texts to abate violence and promote harmonious life.⁹

Most effective tool for religious peace building is interreligious dialogues and constant engagement maintaining the differences. Rampant increase in the ethno-religious conflicts could be instantly checked through inter religious dialogues and gathering which will provide the people the opportunity to know each other and crush the fear caused by ignorance.¹⁰ Hatred of a faithful to other religious people stems from the virtual ignorance of the other. Clash of civilization, maliciously propounded by Samuel Huntington to predict the

⁹ Little, David (ed.). *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion and Conflict Resolution*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp-225-263.

¹⁰ Little, David and Scott Appleby. "A Moment of Opportunity? The Promise of Religious Peace building in an Era of Religious and Ethnic Conflict," in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, eds. H. Coward and G.S. Smith . Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004 . p. 104

nature of violence in the post soviet era, brings the religions, especially Islam, into the dock and wanted the Western hegemony to be imposed upon the world people altogether to ensure the peace dreamt by neo colonial forces. Objecting the arguments of Huntington, Edward Said cited the clash of ignorance as the prime reason for the violence and wanted the civilizational dialogues to clear the mud of fear and ignorance while appreciating the vital role of religions in speeding up the developmental process. To dismantle the apartheid of fear and distrust and to start understanding each other is the first step for active interreligious engagement for the world peace and national development.

Interestingly, interreligious dialogues tap the spiritual resources of the religious traditions creating avenues for connecting participants at deeper spiritual level. Using spirituality and moderate religious interpretations as salient sources of commitment to social changes is what distinguishes the interreligious dialogues from other forms of engagements. Religions as a tool with mass appeal among people which supersedes the emotional bonds of nationality and ethnicity makes the revolutionary transformation conducive because religions tracks the deepest rapport between the self and the other. This opinion is backed by Stalov who observes:

“When religions engage in deep positive interaction with others people overcome the prejudices and fears and replaces them with mutual understanding, respect and bonhomie. It is high time for religious leaders and statesmen to carve a common platform of cooperation and harmony before religions lead to fatal collision.”¹¹

Religious harmony is closely associated with nurturing the pluralistic concepts of world religions; in contrast to the hegemonical views of cultural uniformity and religious homogenization. Innovative mechanisms to be formulated by religious leaders will render the religions to be flexible towards the new challenges of violence and enable cultural and social pluralism even though all religious teachings unambiguously reiterate the concept of exclusive truth and success in eschatological life. By fostering the pluralistic reinterpretation of religions, social cohesion, national integration and cultural assimilation are possible.¹² Unification of people owing different affiliations is possible through asserting the universal

¹¹ Stalov , Yehuda “ Believe It Can Happen: Interfaith Encounter Approach in to the Israeli– Palestinian Conflict ,” in *Beyond Bullets and Bombs: Grassroots Peace Building Between Israelis and Palestinians*, ed. Judy Kuriansky . Westport, CT: Praeger Publications , 2007 , 131 – 137 .

¹² Schirch , Lisa . “Ritual Reconciliation: Transforming Identity/Reframing Conflict ,” in *Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence: Theory and Practice* , ed. Mohammed Abu Nimer . Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, pp. 145 – 163.

human values along with maintaining theological and jurisprudential of religious beliefs and practices.

Religious harmony and national development through integration and assimilation process

The invincibility of the jingoistic political thought that places the nation as the effective binding factor of the citizens, like in Kamalian Turkey and Hitler's Germany, has failed miserably and instead the concept of multiple identities have been identified as forces behind the mass mobilization. Among all, religious identity occupies central importance. Reports show that conflict-ridden countries lag far behind the stable countries in terms of economic growth and national development because conflicts consume precious sources of nation and hinder the optimal use of human skills. Political stability, national safety and civilian security are the prime concerns of business world when they intend massive investments. Due to this reason hardly turbulent countries get the foreign investment and logistical support to develop.

Colonial era witnessed people opposing the concept of 'nation' which led to the religious universal movements like Pan Islamic movement of south Asia and Irish liberation movement. Important reason behind this attitude was it delineated the boundaries based on the cunning craftsmanship of imperial forces to perpetuate the oppressive rule. Besides, all religions perceive an imagined global community of believers sans borders and nations. Nevertheless, in the contemporary era this riddle of religious nationalism has been solved as religious leaders and statesmen adopted more realistic approach to limit religions to regional entities. Muslim scholars adopted a more realistic approach rather than idealism. The debates over the nature of religious politics regarding the administration often instigate the radical elements to wage war against the governments only to culminate in the regional disintegration and violence. Recent terror wave unleashed by ISIS to establish an Islamic caliphate is the fitting example.

Harmonious atmosphere and mutual coexistence foster national development. As all nations are home to various religions it is important to strike balance among these faiths. Unlike other identities, religious identity is highly vulnerable to exploitation and may even pose threats of separatism and militancy. Commenting on the nature of religious, communal violence in India, K.N Panicker explains the fatal impacts of religious violence in the

economic growth of the nation and the severity of jolt to religious fabric that will smolder for decades.

Nowadays conflict resolution ignoring the religious role in social harmonization and reconciliation absolutely deemed unviable. Invoking religious humanism that emphatically brings the religions closer to shared common values of human kind could be used efficiently to address the violence. Scuttling process of integration and assimilation could be easily expedited if the drives in this regard are supported by reinterpretation of religious texts. Analyzing the exemplary cultural assimilation of Kerala Muslims Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella reaches the conclusion that contextual and local interpretation of religious texts as to include within the religious framework strong sense of integration was the factor behind the popularization of secular values in Kerala Muslim experiences.¹³

Religious insurgency and terrorism are the inevitable outcome of lack of integration and growing sense of alienation and social insecurity. Resurging terrorist attacks in Europe by radicalized Muslims are natural fallout of the indifference both by governments and religious leaders to drive home the crucial demand of integrating the migrated Muslims from the so called *darul islam* (abode of Islam) to the *darul harb* (abode of disbelief). Flexibility of religions to assume various positions from moderation to extremism has attracted less attention by scholars. In case of Islam, it has both extremist position of political hegemony only after the willful acceptance of people and moderate position while living in a pluralistic society. Problem lies in projecting the only face of extremism totally incompatible with the modernity and overlooking the pluralistic way of religion.

Religions nurture national integration and inclusivism in social life, key elements for the national development, given that they share many commonalities pertinent to universal human values. Quran commands people to work for development and prosperity setting aside the minor theological differences because diversity is the essential part of god's creation. "O People of the Book let us come to a common statement/word (*kalimat in sawa'in*) between us and you."¹⁴ The concept of Hinduism the universe being the single family (*vasudhaiva Kudumbakam*) supposed to give and take each other also signifies this point. Common values like peace, love harmony, coexistence and so offer wider platforms for religions to converge

¹³Osella, F. & C. Osella. 2000. *Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict*. Pluto, London. pp 35-54

¹⁴ Al Quran 3:64

at liberal cooperation. The onus lies upon governments and scholars along with civil societies to break the handcuffs of religion and liberate from the narrow perceptions.

Appreciating the positive role between religious harmony and national development, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, chairman Centre for Peace and Spirituality, says that it gives immense opportunity for all people to take part in the economical growth pace of every nations:

“Scholars generally define peace as the absence of war. This is a negative definition. The positive definition would be that it is a state in which there are a great many opportunities. The most important role of religious peace is that it opens up the door of opportunities, giving each individual the chance to avail of these opportunities and reach his or her goal.

Through violence you can cut down a tree, but violence cannot help you to grow a tree. This is true in the case of human life. In the human world, war only leads to destruction. Peace, however, has a positive role. No constructive work can be done if there is violence, whereas peace facilitates constructive work on its own. Peace paves the way for nation building along the healthy lines.”¹⁵

Part Two

Hate ideology of Salafism and violence

Salafism is a branch of Sunnite tradition. Salafi movements (often referred to Wahabism)¹⁶ represent a diverse community. All Salafi sects propound a puritanical approach to the religion intended to eschew innovation by strictly emulating the model of Prophet Mohamed and the first generation of Muslims. It is an ultra-conservative fundamentalist movement started with Ahmed ibn Hanbal (780-855). Later ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) popularized the movement through his reform activities and put the postulates for the future evolutions. With advent of Muhamed ibn Abdul Wahab (1703-1792) in Najd¹⁷ Salafism was transformed from passive theological discourses into active political activism with diverse strategies. Efforts of Salafi movements to institutionalize the new creed got materialized with

¹⁵ Khan, Maulana Wahiduddin, *The Ideology of Peace*, Goodwords Publication, p-54, for further reading refer to *Jihad, peace and Inter-Community relations in Islam* and *The Age of Peace* by the same author.

¹⁶ Wahabi tradition derived from the intellectual heritage of Muhamed ibn Abdul Wahab who was himself a fervent reader of ibnTaymiyya

¹⁷ A place in present day Saudi Arabia

the establishment of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 under the theological aegis of Salafi scholars and caused the Salafism gaining ascendancy in the Muslim world. Imperial forces exploited the radical movement to fight against the soviet ambitions in the region. Osama bin Laden was an American protégé dispatched to expel the Red Bears from Afghanistan with the support of America and Saudi Arabia. Abundance of petro dollars of the Saudi Kingdom generously imported this hate ideology into various parts of Muslim world making serious fissures in the religious peaceful status quo.

Salafis are united by a common creed which provides guidelines for applying religious teachings to contemporary issues. This creed concentrates on the stern adherence to the concept of pristine *tawhid* (oneness of God) and emphatic rejection of human subjectivity in the jurisprudence, human reason and logic to interpret the religion. From this Salafi perspective there has only one true religion in the world and only one legitimate religious interpretation in Islam; Islamic pluralism does not exist. In terms of political participation and social engagements Salafi movements could be classified into three; namely purists¹⁸, politicos¹⁹ and *jihadis*²⁰. To sum up, Split in Salafi movements is not in thought but it is in strategy while applying inherently subjective human interpretation to new issues and problems. Stubbornness of Salafi creed on monolithic manifestation of ultimate truth makes the Salafi movement good recipe for violence and hatred stunting national growth. As

¹⁸ As the name suggests, “purists” are primarily concerned with maintaining the purity of Islam as outlined in the Qur’an, Sunna, and consensus of the Companions. They believe that the primary emphasis of the movement should be promoting the Salafi creed and combating deviant practices, just as the Prophet fought polytheism, human desire, and human reason. Until the religion is purified, any political action will likely lead to corruption and injustice because society does not yet understand the tenets of faith. The proper method for implementing the creed is therefore propagation (*da’wa*), purification (*tazkiyya*), and religious education or cultivation (*tarbiya*).

¹⁹ Older scholars dominate the purist faction and attempt to monopolize religious authority by arguing that they alone have the depth of religious training, knowledge, and experience to render judgments about complex issues. Because the purists control the state religious establishment in Saudi Arabia, including the Council of Senior Ulama (Scholars), they enjoy considerable influence over government policy and have used their positions to promote purist interpretations of Islam. Their authority, however, was challenged during the 1980s and 1990s by a group of young, more politically minded Salafi scholars, here referred to as “the politicos.” The politicos argued that they have a better understanding of contemporary issues and are therefore better situated to apply the Salafi creed to the modern context. They generally stop short of declaring revolution, unlike the jihadis, but are highly critical of incumbent regimes. Although the politicos control fewer resources and assets, they have clearly shaken the purist grip over Islamic interpretation and put the older generation of scholars on the defensive.

²⁰ The jihadi faction, those supporting the use of violence to establish Islamic states, emerged during the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. This conflict functioned as a dangerous incubator by exposing Saudi Salafis (and others) to the radical and politicized teachings of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and related splinter groups (the Islamic Group, Islamic Jihad, etc.) in a context of military training and warfare. Unlike the politico exposure to Ikhwan analysis at the universities, the jihadis received their political training on the battlefield. As a result, their introduction was imbued with an emphasis on politics as warfare, something they later brought back to their own countries.

solution, Salafism needs to be reconstructed in order to complete its historical reform mission opposing many blind superstitions crept into the religion while neutralizing the radical elements posing threat to harmony and peace.

Genealogy of Salafi movements: A history of religious intolerance and violence

Is Islam compatible with the new global initiatives for peace and does Islam offer solution to the followers are well discussed. Islam which advocates peace has been falsely construed by radical elements to incite war and social antagonism. It is to be sadly admitted that Islamic *sharia*’ is abused to sanction physical annihilation of diversity, a requirement that God stipulated to work each other for mutual prosperity²¹ and to destabilize the democratic secular governments. As noted by Majid Khadduri, mass emotional appeal of fanatical scholars causes the occasional invoking of selective *sharia*’ laws to prop up the terrorism and spiritual aggression.²² Islam is rooted in universal peace and brotherhood, but historical Islam is abundant with incidents that demonstrate the theological support for pluralism and coexistence. Sufism, peaceful and assimilative spiritual stream of Muslims, enlivened the great pluralistic ideals of Islam wherever it is found.²³ The great dilemma of Muslim world caused by Salafi distortion is about the nature of Islam, whether it is monolithic or pluralistic. According to mainstream Muslims, Islam is both universal in belief and local in practice. Islam suggests uniform and universal laws like belief in one God and Messenger but the practical manifestations are different in various parts to suit the legitimate concerns of the people. Thus, Islam allows for a great deal of integration into local culture and formation of indigenous traditions compatible with the universal teachings of Islam, a key reason behind the spontaneous spread of Islam.

Negation of local cultural traditions preached by Sufis as *bid’a* (religious innovation) and perceiving imagined global communities faithful makes the core of Salafism. This approach disproving pluralism, compounded with other characteristics of radical revolutionary movements renders Salafism a great challenge to intra and interreligious dialogues and harmony, placing the religious chauvinism above national interests and peoples welfare. Salafi belief in exclusive religious truth leads the adherents to stamp tags of apostasy

²¹ Azizan Baharuddin, Raihanah Abdullah, and Lee Wei Chang. “Dialogue of Civilisation: An Islamic Perspective.” *Journal of Dharma* 34 (2009): 301–18.

²² Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), pp. 56-7. See also Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996), pp. 3-17.

²³ Dickson, William Rory, *Living Sufism*, State University of New York Press, Albany, p. 18

and heresy upon others making the opponents legitimate targets of violence. Doctrinal intransigence rid the Salafi movements of the religious responsibility of national integration and civilizational dialogues making them highly susceptible to elimination drive of perceived non-believers. Abdurrahman Wahid, former president of Indonesia, ascribed lack of development to the Salafi puritanical missions in Muslim world.²⁴

Salafism has made inroads to all countries especially in places where Muslims are minority or oppressed community. Through migration from Asia and Africa Salafism reached Europe in seventies. Fundamentalist Salafi scholars funded by Saudi Arabia were dispatched to all parts of world to preach the hate ideology of Salafism. Book by David Commins titled “The Wahabi Mission and Saudi Arabia” minutely tracks the trails of Wahabi expansion in various parts of world. Physical violence, jihad, was widely exercised by Salafism to confront disbelief breaking away from the tradition of Islam engaging in intellectual discourses.

Assaf Moghadam argues that violence and jihad are intrinsic to the puritanical teachings of Salafism as it believes non-believers deserve either submission or death.²⁵ Salafi history began with the bloody warfare against Arabian tribal people being accused of innovative religious practices like *maulid*, celebration of prophet’s birthday and venerating the saints and holy graves. Salafi dogma of keeping a safe distance from the unbelievers in order to keep the faith unadulterated has triggered conflicts with Christians in Nigeria and Sudan and in many European countries. *Al Qaeda, Lashkar e Taiba, Shababul Muslimeen*, ISIS and other radical fundamentalists that constitute the new global *jihadi* movement are not theological outliers of Salafism. Detailed analysis of Salafi radical movements form political abstinence to violence has been deeply studied by Quintan Wiktorowicz in his study titled ‘A Genealogy of Radical Islam’.²⁶

India has and will fall victim to the venomous ideology of Salafism. *Lashkar e Taiba, Indian Mujahideen*, student’s Islamic Movements of India (SIMI) are few organizations that occasionally cripple the peaceful life of Indians. This context solicits candid appreciation for various Salafi movements in Kerala which carried out many reform activities while developing moderate social approach to religious harmony. Strategies should be made to

²⁴ R. Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press/Hurst Publishers, 2009). P. 324

²⁵ Moghadam, Assaf, *motives for martyrdom: Salafi jihad and the spread of suicide attacks*, international security, Vol 33, No 3, pp 46-49

²⁶ Quintan Wiktorowicz, A Genealogy of Radical Islam, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29:207–239, 2006

empower the moderate Salafism. Even Separatists movements in the Kashmir valley are linked to the growth of radical Islamism.²⁷ Suicide bombings and civilian killings are allowed in *jihadi* Salafi ideology in conflicts against the infidels.²⁸ Antique structures of global heritage are not exempt from the Salafi fury against the polytheism and *shirk* (association of partners with God) like ancient city of Timbuktu of Mali, Palmyra buildings of Syria and Bamiyan Buddhist statue of Afghanistan. Intra religious conflicts caused by Salafi anti-*shiiism* and anti-Islamist movements still wreak havoc in the Middle East. A fortified invisible apartheid wall has been erected by Salafism as the region was bifurcated on the lines of two sects. Yemen and Syria bears the grave brunt's of Salafi ideology as it produced trails of destruction. Salafism inculcates an ideology of religious hatred and antipathy that prevents successful religious engagements.²⁹

Dogmatic Salafism and religious discords

Salafi ideology rooted in ultra-conservatism exhorts religious divisions and pluralistic engagements are met with strong legal inhibitions. All Salafi factions hold same belief but are different in practical severity.³⁰ It is highly imperative to understand these discourses in the Salafi *manhaj* (method) to help concerned authorities to establish more accommodative moderate path based on intellectual engagements. To neutralize the people affected with radical Salafi ideology contextual reading of texts need to be enhanced. Contextualization of Islamic politics against the imitation of Prophet and disciples in letter and spirit is very critical due to the reason that Islamic violence is often ascribed to strict textual reading without regarding the social evolution.³¹ As nations after nations fall victim to Salafi outrages it is incumbent upon world communities to defuse the violent identity and transform into more moderate versions. Such a movement to soften the ideological vehemence of Salafism an interfaith dialogue initiative was started by Saudi king Abdulla in 2008 but it failed to

²⁷ Interview with Journalist Tariq Mir on the Rise of a Hard Faith available in YouTube

²⁸Wiktorowicz and Kaltner, *killing in the name of Islam*, p. 88

²⁹ Olivier Roy, *GlobalizedIslam: The Search for a New Umma*, London, Hurst publishers, p-138

³⁰Ali al-Halabi, *Hadhahihyia al-Salafyya: Da'wat al-imanwa-l-amanwa-l-amaan, al-manhajyya al-'ilmiyya al-tarbawyyawa-kashf al-athaar al-tadmiryawata-takfryya*(www.kulalsalafyeen.com, 2011),5–6. Quoted in *polics of quietist Salafism by Jacob Olidort*, Brookings papers. P-20

³¹ Hassan, Muhamed Haniff, (Ed), *Moderation in Islam in the context of Muslim community in Singapore*, Singapore, Pergas, pp-67-96

harmonize the Salafi adherents due to the staunchest criticisms by Salafi scholars accusing the Kingdom of deviating from the true monotheism.³²

Religious pluralism and engagements in Salafism

Basis of Salafi arguments of *jihadism*, *takfirism* (apostasy), and others stems from the outright rejection of Quranic concept of pluralism and diversity and the God's command to engage using the commonalities of all religions. Holy Quran says: "O People of the Book let us come to a common word/statement between us and you."³³ In Islamic legacy religious dialogue is not new; it has lengthy history. Muhamed Hashim Kamali in his article 'Diversity and Pluralism: A Quranic Perspective' has broadly explained the Islamic perception of pluralism. According to Quran, concept of religious unity is not sweeping uniformity and asserts the diversity as an essential nature of human being. "And among His signs is the creation of heaven and earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors, Indeed there are signs in this for those who know."³⁴ According to Salafism plurality and pluralism are sometimes said to be incompatible with the monotheism that Islam demands for its followers.³⁵ To substantiate their vicious hate ideology verses from Quran are misquoted and misplaced like the verses enjoining the believers to unite and let not separation (*tafarruq*) to destroy their unity, taking out of the contexts in which it was revealed.³⁶ These arguments could be easily blunted by using the inherent disagreement (*ikhthilaf*) in the Islamic history and sciences like *ilmul kalam* (theology) and jurisprudence.

Islam profusely allows the space for pluralism and religious harmony as opposed to the uniform concept advanced by Salafism. Quranic verse that suggests Prophet Muhammad completed the religion for the posterity is used by Salafis to illustrate the comprehensive nature of Islam without any interdependence.³⁷ Ethno-regional pluralism, a major bone of contention in the contemporary era, finds theological sanction in Quran. To quote Quran: "O mankind, keep your duty towards your Lord who created you from a single soul and created its mate of the same [kind], and then created from them multitudes of men and women."³⁸ In

³² www.kaiciid.com

³³ Al Quran 3:64

³⁴ Al Quran 30:22

³⁵ Kamali, Muhammad Hashim, *Diversity and Pluralism: A Quranic Perspective*, IAIS Journal, p-31

³⁶ Al Quran 3:103

³⁷ Today, I (God) completed the religion for you (5:3). Revealed during the Final Pilgrimage of Prophet Muhammad in 9 Hijri.

³⁸ Al Quran 4:1

another passage Quran tells about the diversity of creation deliberately demonstrating god's consent for pluralistic way of life. "O mankind, behold, we have created you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know each other. Verily the noblest of you in the sight of God is one who is deeply conscious of God."³⁹

Salafis, in their ardent bid to retain the pristine Islamic monotheism unaffected, they strictly opposes religious pluralism (al-ta'addudiyyah al-diniyyah), fearing the religious engagement may be tantamount to associating partners in faith and acknowledging the veracity of other religions. Quintan Wiktorowicz says:

"This obsession with maintaining and propagating a pure understanding of Islam has produced a strong tendency toward isolationism. Any interaction with nonbelievers is viewed as an opportunity for the nonbelievers to infect Muslims. Although interactions for propagation are permissible, purists see little benefit to dialogue and exchange beyond those needed to spread the faith. After all, if all knowledge and guidance are in the sources of Islam, nonbelievers offer nothing. To think otherwise is to question the supremacy of Islam, something that signifies disbelief.

As a result, purists are highly unlikely to engage in interfaith dialogue and often try to physically separate themselves from non-Muslims. Purist scholars in Saudi Arabia, for example, advise Muslims in Europe to leave the domain of disbelief to avoid any corrupting influence. European Salafis who choose to remain within it try to limit their interactions with the broader society, often developing enclave communities that function like Salafi ghettos. They reject association with non-Muslims in their countries of residence and instead view themselves as part of an international imagined community of true believers. Their identity is predicated on their creed and not their country.⁴⁰

"This policy of isolation to avoid corrupting influences is applied to other Muslims as well. Followers are asked to avoid interactions with deviant sects, which are defined as any groups that do not follow the purist interpretation of Islam. There is thus very little intra-faith dialogue as well."⁴¹

³⁹ Al Quran 13: 49

⁴⁰ Roy, *Globalised Islam*, pp. 275–287; Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 251–252

⁴¹ Wiktorowicz, Quintan, *Anatomy of the Salafi Movement*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29:207–239, 2006

This kind of thoughts would fare bad in maintaining fragile social relationships in increasingly globalized era. Strict textual literalist reading is the major problems Salafism. While criticizing Salafism one should carry in mind the revolutionary changes Salafism brought in many parts of world in the way Islam is practiced, but this does not justify the feeble arguments of radical Salafi scholars who contend comprehensiveness and mutual exclusive preventing the ideology to evolve timely. Various elements in Salafi ideology like *Takfiri* (declaring apostasy), *jihad*, *al wala' wa l bara'* (loyalty and disavowal) and others infuse the adherents with virulent fundamentalism and extremism. These beliefs demand more explanation in order to find solutions to Salafi threat against world peace and religious harmony.

al wala' wa l bara'

The Salafi concept of *al wala' wa l bara'* roughly translatable as loyalty and disavowal,⁴² has been considered by many as a recipe for extremism. This idea states that all Muslims should show loyalty to God, Islam and Muslims and everything else should be disavowed and opposed. It is definitely true that *al wala' wa l bara'* divides the world into two separate binaries of which one is good and one is evil. This means Salafis maintain strong bonds of loyalty and brotherhood among Salafi Muslims on the one hand as well as extreme forms of piety through disavowal of everything and everyone considered un-Islamic. Adherents of this concept can therefore use it to set up boundaries between religious groups and create divisions and likely even sectarianism. *al wala' wa l bara'* repudiates even the narrow scope for pluralism and diversity. In western context, *al wala' wa l bara'* is used as a bulwark against successful integration into society. A certain amount of radicalism thus seems to be connected with the concept of *al wala' wa l bara'*.⁴³

The origins of *al wala' wa l bara'* is traced back to pre-Islamic Arabia and early heterodox Islamic sects. In pre-Islamic Arabia it implied that while members of the tribe were bound to each other by strong ties, relations between different tribes were not always very peaceful. They were often at war with other tribes over petty issues. At outset, this concept was not changed considerably with the advent of Islam and was modified by Muslims in such a way that suited their new needs. Later, the gradual growth of Islam eroded these divisions

⁴² For a comprehensive description of the different meanings of both terms (linguistics and technical meanings), see Arabic-English Lexicon, vol. I, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984, pp. 30601

⁴³ Wagemakers, Joas, *The Transformation of a Radical Concept: al wala' wa l bara' in the ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*, Foundation Books, pp. 81-82

as Muslims had to come to terms with other people for practical reasons. The first Islamic group to use *al wala' wa l bara' I* as part of its doctrine was apparently the sect known as Kharijites. Kharijites incorporated *al wala' wa l bara'* into their beliefs, showing loyalty to other members of the group while disavowing outsiders. Motivated by this concept of exclusivism Kharijites spawned many problems in early Islamic society.⁴⁴

After several centuries of relative silence on the topic of *al wala' wa l bara'*, the concept was built into discussion by ibn Taymiyya. He explains:

“After centuries of pre Islamic ignorance, Islam came to show the people the right path, which Muslims must not deviate from. Jewish and Christian influences, however, have sullied the true path of Islam. So Muslims must cling to the straight path denouncing all others. Muslims should not attend the festivals and ceremonies of Judaism and Christianity because Almighty Allah says in Quran: O believers, take not Jews and Christians as friends (awliya'), they are friend of each other. Whoso of you makes them his friend is one of them. God guides not the people of the evildoers.”⁴⁵

Salafi scholars used the concept as a means to fight other religions and assumed *bida'* (innovations). Beside they assert that *al wala' wa l bara'* is an indispensable part of Islam and that all Muslims must give their exclusive loyalty to God. If they do their loyalty to someone or something else, they are considered *kuffar* (apostates) with whose war could be waged.⁴⁶ Showing enmity to polytheists, other religions and non-Salafi Muslims is considered benchmark to identify true Muslims. This belief is the evident reason for Salafi aversion for religious cooperation and dialogues.

Takfirism⁴⁷

The debate over *takfir*, represents one of the most prominent sources of violence in Salafism. This deals with the apostasy of Muslims which technically make them a legal scapegoat of violence backed by *sharia'* and thus motivates attacks against non-Salafi Muslim sects. This concept of Salafism is borrowed from the Kharijites doctrine of declaring

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84

⁴⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *iqtida' al-sira al-mustaqim mukhalafat ashab al-jahim*, www.tawed.ws, pp.3-9

⁴⁶ Sulayman ibn 'abdullah Al al-Shaykh, Awthaq 'ara al-Iman, www.tawed.ws, pp.2-6

⁴⁷ Although the word *takfeer* had already been used by islamologists for some time, it was first used by mainstream media in 1977 in connection with the Shaukri Mustafa case.

all Muslims renegade if they did not fall in their line.⁴⁸ *Takfirism* stems from the very controversial nature of the religious concept of *takfir*, which is the act of pronouncing of someone as unbeliever (excommunication) and placing him/her outside the community of believers. In classical Islamic jurisprudence, *takfir* is an extremely serious measure that can be pronounced by qualified religious authorities under very specific circumstances. Salafism lavishly uses this concept to excommunicate all opposing their path; hence intra-faith dialogues are hardly impossible in radical Salafism.⁴⁹

In the modern context, excommunication is essentially a theological or ideological maneuver to ostracize other Muslims; a tool significantly employed by the Salafi scholars. Roots of Salafi antipathy against Shi'ism is the direct consequence of *takfiri* movement of Salafism. The Shia'-Sunni (Salafism is considered as a branch of Sunnism) divide proliferated due to this ideology has exacerbated the fragile social relationship in the Middle East. While the conglomerate under Saudi Arabia leads the Salafi alliance, Iran spearheads Shi'ite nations. The futile war to protect the vested interests of these two warlords set off much epidemic violence in the region. To reach at mutual cooperation heads of two nations along with the religious leaders must make compromises in their ideological fundamentalism.

Jihad⁵⁰

Jihadi movements of Salafism or jihadi Salafism like al Qaeda, Taliban and ISIS are closely associated with its complex, narrow political concepts. The problematic interaction of Salafism with the real world and politics has been compounded by its relationship with violence. Logically, violence stems from the same rejection of reality as corrupt and corrupting because it leads to compromise in doctrine and practice (*manhaj*) that lie at basis of apolitical Islam. Jihadi-Slafism found its original inspiration from Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), whose ideas on pre-Islamic society (*jahiliyya*) and sovereignty of God (*hakimiyya*), coincide with those of Salafism, but are much more politicized. Yusuf al-Uyairi, is a good a contemporary *jihadi* who combined the Salaf terminology of *tawhid*, purification (*tazkiya*) and pure intention (*niyya*) with a sharp and ruthless analysis of reality, geared to

⁴⁸ Article by Quintan Wiktorowicz titled *Anatomy of the Salafi Movement* profoundly analyzes the theoretical resemblances between Kharijites and Salafism.

⁴⁹ Bruce Livesey, *The Salafist Movement*, *frontline*, www.pbs.org/25/june/2005

⁵⁰ Struggle or religious war.

implementation of a *jihadi* strategy, thus producing a Salafi activist concept of praxis that is comparable to Leninism.⁵¹

Jihadi Salafism is blinded by the antagonism towards West, declaring war against them. Recent attacks in Europe against the innocent civilians are legitimate within the legal extension of maintaining enmity against *kuffar* and striving to pulverize them.⁵² Admittedly, corporate interests of neo-imperialists forces add oil to the fuel. Even the thought of Taliban outrage in Afghanistan staged by Salafi Jihadist Osama bin Laden or the violent trail being hacked by ISIS in Iraq and Syria shudders the entire human conscience and make them numb. By instituting the martyr cult of religion *Jihadi* Salafism encourage a strong tendency among Muslims towards religious alienation.

Strategies to counter Salafi threat to religious harmony and pluralism

Recognizing the historical responsibility of Salafism in reforming the Muslim community, Salafi ideology urgently needs a few amendments to spread peace and harmony among adherents. Sweeping generalization of all Salafi factions exposing radical doctrine is erroneous given that many moderate streams are also present in Salafism who lively participate in peace initiatives and national building. Few strategies suggested by terrorism experts to counter the Salafi threat are given below:

1. Encourage contextual reinterpretation of texts:

The processes to contextualize the textual reading of Salafism will enable the community to understand ground realities of present day rather than working for ‘Utopian Muslim golden age’. Contextual reading of texts will clear the ambiguities occurred while literally reading the texts.

2. Building networks of moderate Salafism

As Salafism is a diverse community, among them the moderate factions must be promoted to rein in the tides of extremist radicalization. RAND Corporation in 2001 suggested the world community to nurture the growth of moderate purists while declaring stern actions against Jihadi Salafis.

⁵¹ Bernard Rougier, *Every Day Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam among Palestinian in Lebanon*, Cambridge, 2007, pp-53-61

⁵² Frank E. Vogel, *Islamic Law and Legal System: Studies Of Saudi Arabia*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, pp. 74-76

3. Thwart online radicalization

A study by Wirenews in the wake dozens of youths from India joining the ISIS to fight for Islamic Caliphate revealed the extremity of online radicalization by fanatical Salafi scholars. Serious curbs must be imposed by related authorities to foil the attempts by extremist quarters to mobilize people through online resources.

4. Popularize Sufi Islam

Salafi antithesis against Sufism deserves moderate changes. While the fact is true that Sufi Islam institutionalized many accrued traditions of disbelief, its inherent character of inclusivism and peaceful religion propagation are the best tools in modern world to reduce the religious violence misleadingly promoted by Islam.

5. Ideologically fight the radical preachers

History proves that armed efforts to eliminate the radical elements will breed more violence as hate mongers exploit the sensitive emotions of people. Integration process run by Singapore government successfully transformed the violent Salafism into peaceful one.⁵³

Conclusion

This essay constructs and deconstructs three main discourses created by different and opposing trends in modern Islamic thought that are normally and mistakenly lumped together as fundamentalism, Salafism, neo-salafism, Wahhabism, jihadism, Islamic radicalism and others. Salafism is a very diversified and complicated ideologically and religiously motivated trend and is thus not constructed by one unified discourse or authority. As a rule, all Wahhabis are Salafis, but not all Salafis are Wahhabis.

The tendency to undermine the role of religion in peace building process is totally foolish. Likewise, the argument that states all Salafi factions is problematic; hence, they are not able to doctrinal compromise to reduce violence. As Salafism is a marvelous group of sects having puritanical views in general, includes both moderate and extremist streams. Considering the role Salafis to play in community reforming the society, efforts should be made from the part of government and scholars to refurbish moderate Salafism geared to live in mutual coexistence

⁵³ For more information look at Ramadan, Tariq. 2004. Western Muslims and the Future of Islam. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp.154-178

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