

# AN INQUIRY INTO TALIBAN THEOLOGY: DEOBANDISM WITH A PASHTUNWALI FLAVOR



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# **An Inquiry into Taliban Theology: Deobandism with a Pashtunwali Flavor**

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Author: Abdul Kabier Salehi

Translated: Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS)

Radicalism-IX

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## Foreword

The resurgence of the Taliban to power in August 2021 plunged the world into profound shock and consternation. particularly the citizens of Afghanistan paid dearly for this horrifying occurrence, which left them with a bitter taste, enveloping them in widespread fear and indescribable horror. Many of them recalled the bloodshed, violence, brutality, and the Taliban's anti-civilization and anti-women practices during their previous rule, and the re-imposition of the " Sharia of the whip " terrified and horrified them once again.

Initially, some observers mistakenly believed that the Taliban had learned from their past mistakes, asserting that this time around, they would refrain from imposing stringent policies and extremist approaches on the people. However, this optimistic and unfounded belief proved short-lived. Immediately upon assuming power, the Taliban swiftly reinstated the whip of Sharia, embarking on a path marked by bloodshed, violence, gender-based oppression, strictures, and widespread harassment of the people. They imposed numerous constraints on women in the realms of education, attire, employment, political participation, and social engagement. In particular, they closed the gates of schools and universities to girls, justifying these harsh and oppressive measures by citing Sharia doctrines and theological propositions.

Hence, it is not an exaggeration to assert that many of the Taliban's harsh and unconventional behaviors find their roots in their theology, emanating from the foundational beliefs and religious doctrines they adhere to. Consequently, until we acquaint ourselves with the intellectual framework and theological perspective of the

Taliban, we will be unable to provide an accurate and insightful analysis of the nature and rationale behind these behaviors.

Concerning the foregoing considerations, the present work aims to evaluate the theology of the Taliban and scrutinize and identify its major internal dimensions and foundational components. In this endeavor, we strive to dissect the discourse of Talibanism and unveil the underlying layers of their interpretation of Islam. We shed light on these layers and hope that this modest attempt finds acceptance among enthusiasts, with the collaboration of conscientious critics contributing to the rectification and refinement of its deficiencies and distortions.

In conclusion, it is incumbent upon me to express gratitude to the contributors at the Afghanistan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS). I am confident that, without the collaboration of this institution, the groundwork for the composition, publication, and dissemination of this work would not have been possible. It is worth noting that the contents of this writing reflect the perspectives and investigative efforts of the author and in no way represent the official stance of the Afghanistan Institute for Strategic Studies.

Abdul Kabir Salehi  
Winter 2024

## **Foreword Afghan Institute for Strategic Studie-AISS**

In the research and scholarly system, the presence of various theories and perspectives contributes to the dynamism and enrichment of the scientific space. Analyzing and investigating essential topics that have captured the attention of researchers and enthusiasts is the primary task of the scientific system. In continuation of the series of research by the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, this research focuses on the extremism in Afghanistan and the region, specifically examining the typology of the political theology of the Taliban. With the use of Islamic sources and historical works, the study examines critical concepts such as radicalism, jihadism, the implementation of Sharia, enjoining good and forbidding evil, and gender-based oppression within this theological framework.

This research presents a different perspective on the political theology of the Taliban, aiming for a deeper understanding of its role in the formation and continuity of this group. The examination and analysis provided by this research contribute significantly to a better understanding of the internal dynamics and elements of this movement, with implications for international politics and security.

The current study meticulously addresses the theological issues of the Taliban, introducing the theoretical framework used and elucidating the significance of the "contextual awareness" method for analyzing the Taliban's theology, revealing details of their beliefs. In the central section, the typology of the Taliban's political theology and its fundamental aspects are examined, separating different theological issues and introducing the main elements of



the group, allowing the reader to become familiar with the principles and beliefs of the Taliban.

In conclusion, through summarization and conclusion, the author presents the results of their analysis to the reader and discusses essential points of this research. The Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) hopes that by providing this scientific research, it contributes to enhancing the understanding of readers and enthusiasts regarding the theology of the Taliban.

The research series of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) to the issue of extremism in Afghanistan:

- Trends in Student Radicalization across University Campuses in Afghanistan
- Trends in Radicalization across Unregistered Madrassas in Afghanistan
- Social Media and Articulation of Radical Narratives in Afghanistan
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- Islamic State Wilayat Khorasan, Phoney Caliphate or Bona Fide Province?
- Education and Politics: The Roots of Religious Radicalism in Afghanistan's School Curricula

## **Abstract**

This article endeavors to scrutinize and identify the intellectual origins and theological foundations of the Taliban, a recognized radical Islamic movement. In pursuit of this objective, the author critically assesses Talibanic theology, deconstructs its formative framework, thoroughly examines its prominent elements, and delineates its fundamental components. The author's inquiry relies on leveraging works authored by senior and high-ranking members of the Taliban to elucidate this group's ideological underpinnings and theological facets. By employing the capacities of the theory of "situated cognition" and citing secondary research sources, the article provides an objective analysis and explanation thereof.

The article starts with an introduction and continues with conceptualization and theoretical framework sections before delving into the fundamental components of Taliban theology. Subsequent sections encompass the article's summary and conclusion.

**Keywords:** Taliban theology, Political theology, Deobandism, Pashtunwali, Sharia, Takfirism, Jihadism, Gynophobia.

## **Introduction**

The emergence of the Taliban stands as one of the most significant and consequential events in contemporary Afghanistan. Rarely has an event of this magnitude and transformation occurred within the country's recent century-long history. Esteemed analysts consider this occurrence a pivotal turning point, as it has instigated a redefinition of critical concepts such as governance, security, legality, culture, women's rights, and civil rights in Afghanistan. This transformation has significantly altered power structures, social dynamics, cultural traditions, and religious approaches. Moreover, this transformative event has dramatically changed the trajectory of recent Afghan history and has profoundly influenced the regional and global geopolitical perspective. Consequently, there is a pressing need for comprehensive studies to delve into this event's intricate and extensive dimensions.

Over the past approximately three decades since the Taliban emerged on the Afghan political scene, domestic and international scholars have endeavored to comprehend and examine the essence of the phenomenon. However, the bulk of existing research concerning the Taliban has predominantly centered on genealogy, historical antecedents, intelligence affiliations, geopolitical nature, and the political-military background of the group. In this context, the exploration and identification of the intellectual origins, ideological frameworks, and theological underpinnings of the Taliban as a radical Islamic faction have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. Accordingly, as researchers have overlooked these critical aspects, a relatively small body of research has been devoted to this specific area.

Therefore, the present research aims to address this deficiency by subjecting Taliban theology to critical assessment, examining the foundations of its formation, scrutinizing its core tenets, and delineating its elemental constituents. By scrutinizing and comprehending these aspects, it enables the placement of Taliban behavior and actions within the framework of their beliefs. Moreover, a profound understanding of the Taliban's theological perspectives and ideological foundations empowers us to comprehend their political-religious positions more perceptively, analyze their macro-narratives more accurately, and devise more effective strategies and counter-narratives to address them. It will finally enable us to challenge the Taliban discourse more successfully.

The present research falls within the realm of descriptive-analytical investigations, and concerning the data collection method, it is categorized among library studies. This method enables the present study to describe the ideological foundations and theological components of the Taliban with the aid of relevant library resources. Moreover, using the Situated Cognition theory as the study's theoretical framework will enable the author to provide an objective analysis and explanation of these elements.

The sources referenced in this article are categorized into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources encompass works authored by senior and high-ranking members of the Taliban, such as *Islamic Emirate and Systems* by Abdul Hakim Haqqani, the current Chief Justice of the Taliban; *Badr al-Fatawi* by Mawlawi Noor Mohammad Saqib, Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs of the Taliban; *Taliban: From Kandahar to Mazar* by Mullah Abdul

Salam Zaef; *What Did the Islamic Emirate Give Us?* by Hafiz Noor Saeed; *Enactment for the Mujahideen* by Mufti Rashad Afghani published on the Islamic Emirate's official website, and similar publications. Notably, the *Islamic Emirate and Systems* stands as the most cited source, serving as a manifest work addressing the theological inclinations of the Taliban, authored by one of their most senior leaders and often regarded as the ideological cornerstone of the group.

The secondary sources cited in the study predominantly originated from English-language publications within Western academic circles. However, apart from the English sources and to substantiate its claims, the article draws extensively on Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Urdu, and Pashto sources to reflect a comprehensive scope of diverse perspectives and enrich the research by integrating various relevant viewpoints. In providing in-text and bibliographic citations, the study adheres to the guidelines put forward by the American Psychological Association (APA) Manual of Style across the primary and secondary sources.

The different sections of the study are categorized under the headings of Introduction, Conceptual Analysis, Theoretical Framework, Taliban Theology and Its Fundamental Components, and Conclusion section. After the Introduction, the author elucidates the essential concepts and terminologies employed in the title, expounding on their intended meanings. Subsequently, the theory of Situated Cognition, the study's theoretical framework, is briefly elucidated. Then, the article elaborates on a typology of the Taliban theology and its fundamental constituents and summarizes the study with a succinct Conclusion.

# 1. Conceptual Analysis

## 1.A. Theology

The term “theology” corresponds in meaning with the Arabic word *Ilahiyat*. *Ilahiyat* is the plural form of *Ilahi* (which means “divine”). *Ilahi* itself consists of two components: *Ilah*, meaning “God,” and the adjectival suffix “-i.” Hence, *Ilahiyat* signifies the matters and issues related to God. The English term “theology” is also a combination of two Greek roots: *theos* – meaning “god” – and *logia* – meaning “-logy,” theory or science (Merriam-Webster dictionary).

Therefore, “theology” can be understood as the “study of God.” However, the semantic scope of the term – specifically in the case of the Arabic/Persian term *Ilahiyat* – extends beyond this sense and encompasses a broader range of meanings. It applies to a kind of cognitive endeavor that, apart from God, addresses other religious propositions such as prophecy, afterlife, revelation, angels, Satan, predestination, disbelief, faith, worship, disobedience, the relationship between God and humans, good and evil, and so forth. Considering this particular point, the present writing employs the “Taliban theology” to denote the Taliban’s religious cognitive approaches. Accordingly, it seeks to embark on a typological analysis of the Taliban theology, elucidate the principal components of the Taliban’s interpretation of Islam, and examine the theological foundations and ideological underpinnings that provide a justified and motivational framework for their political conduct and social behavior.

## **1.B. Taliban:**

The term “Taliban” refers to a quasi-militant and Islamist movement that emerged in Afghanistan's political and social sphere in 1994. During the formation of this movement, Afghan jihadist parties, previously victorious in a battle against the Soviet occupation and its puppet regime, engaged in internal conflict primarily over the monopolization and consolidation of wealth and power resources. Amidst the heated and devastating conflict, a group of religious scholars and students, predominantly educated in Deobandi schools located in Akora Khattak, Peshawar, Quetta, Banuri, and Karachi in Pakistan, gathered on the outskirts of Kandahar and armed themselves to strengthen security, implement Shariah, safeguard honor and dignity of the nation, and prevent the oppression and plundering of people’s possessions (Rashid, 1382, pp. 51-60; Zarmati, 1398, pp. 7-11).

Upon their initial emergence, the group chose the “Taliban Movement” title for itself and swiftly engaged in armed conflicts, culminating in the seizure of control over the city of Kandahar in November 1994. Substantial support from regional and international powers ensued, bolstering the decisive triumph of the Taliban Movement (Muzhda, 1382, pp. 19-29; Haqqani, 1997, pp. 69-90). They rapidly proceeded to occupy various other cities in Afghanistan, ultimately imposing an extremist interpretation of Sharia law upon entering Kabul in September 1996. Following the devastating attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States accused the Taliban of supporting terrorism. Forming an international coalition, the U.S. prepared extensive attacks against

the group, swiftly ousting them from their position of power within a brief period.

Despite their initial setback, the Taliban swiftly revitalized and instigated widespread rebellions against the regime, which was backed by international forces in Afghanistan. The increase in the Taliban's rebellions prompted the U.S. to reconsider its military presence in Afghanistan and pave the way for initiating Doha peace negotiations (Abbas, 2023, p. 221). These negotiations ultimately provided the grounds for the Taliban to sweep back into power in Afghanistan in August 2021, reasserting their radical and stringent religious ideology over the fate and lives of millions of Afghan people.

### **1.C. Deobandism:**

Deobandism, or Deobandi Hanafism, stands as one of the most influential contemporary Islamic movements, fostering the intellectual groundwork for the emergence and proliferation of religious extremism in South and Middle Asian countries, including Afghanistan. Originating in the town of Deoband, situated in the Saharanpur district near Delhi, the Capital of India, the movement traces its roots to a small school established in 1857. Through the efforts of Mawlana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and Sheikh Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, the small school evolved into a prestigious Darul Uloom in 1867 (Salehi, 1396a, p. 37). Before the establishment of Darul Uloom Deoband, multiple religious schools in the Indian subcontinent taught a uniform curriculum to the Hanafis. Compiled by Mullah Nizamuddin Sehalavi (d. 1748), the curriculum was known as “Dars-e Nizami” (meaning “Nizami



Teachings”) and encompassed subjects including morphology, syntax, rhetoric, logic, philosophy, mathematics, theology, principles of jurisprudence, and hadith studies. Notably, *Dars-e Nizami* accorded greater importance to rational sciences while relegating traditional sciences (Moj, 2015, p. 3). The same stance on traditional studies relegated hadith studies to a more marginal role in the *Dars-e Nizami* curriculum, as taught in a book entitled *Mishkat al-Masabih* (Ramazan & Rabab, 2013, p. 36). These circumstances led Salafis in the Indian subcontinent to level severe criticisms against the Hanafis, asserting that the Hanafi school lacked conformity with Prophetic traditions and insisted on speculative and analogy-based reasoning (Zaman, 2007, pp. 30-31).

In response to these criticisms, Darul Uloom Deoband was founded to defend the Hanafi religious identity against rival schools across the subcontinent and demonstrate the Hanafists’ conformity with prophetic traditions (or the “Sunnah”). Influenced by the thoughts of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi and his son Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlawi, the founders sought to highlight hadith studies by mandating the teaching of *Kutub al-Sittah* and the *Muwatta* of Imam Malik in the curriculum. They relegated the study of rational sciences as futile subjects, consequently marginalizing these disciplines (Lohlker, 2022, p. 205). The emphasis on hadith studies bore fruit over the decades, as the Darul Uloom Deoband trained some of the most prominent hadith scholars of the contemporary Islamic world, who aimed to demonstrate the Hanafi school’s conformity with the prophetic traditions, producing extensive publications and establishing a paradigm of “Hadith-oriented Hanafism.”

The launch of this paradigm marked a pivotal moment in the history of the Hanafi school, distancing Deobandism from its initial intellectual tradition, elevating the status of transmitted knowledge over rationality, and aligning Deobandism with Salafi and Hadith studies in theological and foundational matters. Today, the traces of Salafism are much more evident in Deobandism than those of Hanafism, and Deobandi scholars mostly pursue the ideas of the Salafi school of thought. Consequently, the educational model of Darul Uloom Deoband proliferated throughout the Indian subcontinent, establishing branches in various regions, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan and the border areas of Pashtunistan. In subsequent decades, these institutions nurtured several leaders and mid- to lower-level members of the Taliban movement (Hartung, 2021, pp. 127-130).

#### **1.D. Pashtunwali:**

Pashtunwali, also referred to as Pakhtunwali comprises a set of values and norms that govern the rights, duties, personal relationships, and social interactions among the Pashtun people. It can be concisely termed as the Pashtuns' lifestyle, code of conduct, and way of life. Most Pashtuns strongly adhere to this code, considering a deviation from it a loss of authenticity and identity. The Taliban, primarily composed of Pashtuns (Kriti, 2017, p. 996), are no exception and do not deviate from their commitment to Pashtunwali values and norms. Pashtunwali outlines three types of obligations for its followers: (1) *Pashtun Laral*, meaning ethnic belonging to the Pashtun lineage; (2) *Pashtun Wayal*, meaning proficiency in the Pashto language; and (3) *Pashtun Kawal*, meaning a commitment to the principles and values of Pashtunwali

(Hartung, 2021, pp. 147-149). These threefold obligations essentially form a canopy that controls and delimits its adherents' thoughts, speech, and behavior, restricting them from straying beyond its confines.

Pashtunwali is rooted in various ethical values and normative structures. Among all its principles, "shame and honor" (*nang wa namus*), "retribution and revenge" (*badal wa Intiqam*), and "self-respect and dignity" (*izzat wa qairat*) appear to be the most significant ones. So important are these three principles that one can claim all other Pashtunwali principles are set to serve them. Accordingly, the following provides a brief overview of the three fundamental principles.

### **The Principle of Shame and Honor:**

In Pashtunwali, *nang* (shame) is directly associated with *namus* (honor), where *namus* signifies "sanctity" and encompasses the three major elements of "woman," "wealth," and "land" (Hanafi, 2019, pp. 65-75). According to the Pashtunwali value system, a man of honor and devoid of shame is one who safeguards this triangle from outsiders' invasion and fearlessly defends this sanctity (Glatzer, 1998, pp. 86-89).

It is worth noting that the "shame and honor" principle acts as a decree for the ownership and control of women's bodies. In the Pashtunwali tradition, a woman's body belongs to the masculine domain. Before marriage, a woman is considered part of her father's property; after marriage, she becomes part of her husband's possessions. In Pashtunwali, women are not merely

victims of discrimination; they are also objectified. The two concepts bear considerable differences: In “discrimination,” women assume a lower social and political status compared to men; however, as regards “objectification,” having no status altogether, women are merely considered objects and properties belonging to men. Hence, men of honor are obliged to protect tribal women vehemently (Rzehak, 2011, pp. 9-10).

In other words, if a woman seeks protection, she must be isolated within her home. This idea is in conformance with the well-known Pashtun proverb, “A woman is either in the house or in the grave,” denoting that the ideal state for women is to remain indoors until the end of their lives and only venture outside when necessary. Notably, according to Pashtun traditions, permissible reasons for women to leave their homes are extremely constrained, such that even education and employment do not fall under these allowances. Generally considered a male activity, employment is strictly prohibited for women according to Pashtunwali traditions. Essentially, Pashtunwali confines women’s activities to the triad responsibilities of homemaking, marital intimacy, and childbearing. Therefore, a woman must limit herself within the household to efficiently fulfill these sacred duties. Engaging in activities outside the confines of the household not only falls short of carrying out these three sacred duties but also tarnishes the honor and dignity of the family and the tribe.

## **The Principle of Retaliation and Revenge:**

Generally denoting exchange and reciprocity, “retaliation” (*badal*) signifies the obligation to compensate for damages, seek retribution, and necessitates reimbursement and unconditional compensation in the context of Pashtunwali culture (Rzehak, 2011, p.14). The retaliation principle establishes a legitimate and normative framework for individual and societal retaliatory responses. Grounded in this principle, every individual has the right and, concurrently, the obligation to administer justice and seek vengeance for injustices perpetrated against them (Hanifi, 2019, pp. 64-66). However, the principle of retaliation is often deemed unjust. For instance, when an individual or group causes someone’s death, reason and jurisprudence dictate that only the perpetrator should face fair prosecution and receive appropriate punishment. Nevertheless, according to Pashtunwali’s principle of retaliation, if the perpetrator is inaccessible, their brother, father, or paternal cousin could stand trial, or even the perpetrator’s sister could be offered compensation to the victim’s family. Considering this aspect, the retaliation principle is not subject to dismissal or abandonment and must be enforced at any cost. Even if the guilty individual is out of reach, the victim’s family is entitled to seek retribution from the perpetrator’s relatives. According to this principle, abstaining from seeking vengeance is a sign of cowardice and dishonor, and a Pashtun has no recourse but to exact revenge on the aggressor or their family at any cost (Miakhil, 2009, p. 6).

## **The Principle of Bigotry and Prejudice:**

Bigotry signifies the spirit of defending and supporting one's tribe, while prejudice denotes a spirit of conflict, enmity, and hostility toward outsiders. From the early days of shaping their character, those immersed in Pashtunwali culture familiarize themselves with the ideological differentiation and boundary-setting mechanisms, learning to demarcate between themselves and their core values against alien ones. This differentiation and delineation are based on the dichotomy of "good" versus "evil" and "right" versus "wrong." In the eyes of such an individual, the values of their tribe and clan represent true goodness and righteousness, while the values of other ethnic groups are entirely repugnant, corrupt, and wrong. Even though individuals and groups within Pashtunwali-affiliated tribes may engage in internal conflicts, they invariably unite against external hypothetical enemies. From this perspective, it can be argued that "bigotry" is the principle that stabilizes intra-tribal relations among Pashtuns, providing a framework to unite against the 'other' and maintain cohesion and solidarity, setting aside conflicting interests, beliefs, and ideologies.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework utilized in this research to elucidate and analyze the intellectual foundations and theological underpinnings of the Taliban is the theory of Situated Cognition. A relatively recent approach, Situated Cognition theory, was introduced in the late 1980s by Paul Duguid, John Seely Brown, and Allan Collins, progressively strengthening its theoretical foundations and garnering increased attention and focus from cognitive scientists. Before the emergence of this theory, the dominant approach in cognitive sciences posited cognition as a solely mental and entirely abstract process occurring exclusively within the human mind, with no influence from the external world (Norman, 1993, p.1). Situated Cognition theory challenged this approach, known as classic cognitivism, rejected the abstractionism of cognition, and contended that the external world significantly influences human cognitive processes such as perception, thinking, learning, knowledge acquisition, and the like.

Situated Cognition theory is an interdisciplinary approach drawing from analytical philosophy, continental philosophy (particularly the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty), pragmatism (notably the works of John Dewey and George Mead), and psychological perspectives like Lev Vygotsky and James Jerome Gibson (Solomon, 2007, p. 414). Advocates of Situated Cognition propose various theoretical underpinnings, some of which are briefly examined below.

## **2.A. Action-oriented Cognition:**

Cognition is an action-oriented process inherently tied to practical motivations. Practical motivations are highly influential at all stages of cognitive processes, such as receiving, processing, analysis, examination, evaluation, information retention, and the like. These motivations prompt the cognitive agent to adopt a pragmatic approach to cognitive processes, continuously adjusting their cognitive judgments and conclusions based on practical life exigencies (Smith & Semin, 2004, pp.57-67).

## **2.B. Embodied Cognition:**

Cognition does not solely occur within the confines of the human mind; instead, it arises from the interaction, collaboration, and cooperation between the human mind and body. Contrary to Descartes' claims, the mind and body are not distinct entities; they are intricately and inseparably connected. Consequently, the physical-experiential aspects of human beings and the emotional and mental states derived from them significantly impact cognitive processes within human minds (Smith & Semin, 2004, pp.67-74; Kosmas & Zaphiris, 2018, pp. 930-933; Soliman et al., 2015, pp. 853-856).



## **2.C. Cognition's Dependence on the Social Milieu and Cultural Context:**

Cognition is a process with temporal and spatial dimensions. The cognitive processing within an individual's mind is significantly influenced by the time and place where a human lives. In other words, the cognitive process is continually affected by the "here and now" experienced by the cognitive agent and is subject to influences from their lived experiences, social experiences, and cultural mentalities. So pervasive is the extent of this influence that it encompasses even the most rudimentary cerebral processes (Güss, 2015, p. 12). Certain scholars advocate for the unity between an individual's mind and the external reality, contending that an indivisible link exists between an individual's mind and his/her culture, precluding any clear demarcation or distance between them (Hung et al., 2007, p. 710; Yama, 2018, pp. 624-637; Ji, 2016, pp.105-111). Placed in culturally heterogeneous environments, individuals think divergently and harbor distinct mentalities. It signifies that thought processes do not merely emanate within an individual's mind; instead, the external world, social milieu, and cultural mentality play an influential role in the genesis of thoughts and the formation of their internal elements (Oyserman, 2011, p. 182; Oyserman, 2015, p. 8). Broadly speaking, a dynamic and mutually influential interaction can be claimed to exist between the mind, on the one hand, and culture, social milieu, and external reality, on the other. This dynamic and mutually influential interaction profoundly impacts the cognitive structures of society, fostering the creation of a distinctive intellectual system. From this perspective, it becomes challenging to distinguish between religious and non-religious thoughts, as

religious thought bears the imprint from the socio-cultural milieu in the same way non-religious thought does. The influence of the socio-cultural environment becomes distinctly visible in various domains, particularly in comprehending and interpreting religious concepts. Religious texts and theological foundations are often understood and interpreted through the lens of values, norms, and experiences derived from the socio-cultural spheres of readers and interpreters, resulting in divergences between different communities in terms of their interpretations of religion and understanding of theological foundations (Eyghen, 2015, p. 310; Lazar, 2004, pp. 64-71).

The Situated Cognition theory provides an instrumental theoretical framework enabling the analysis and examination of the Taliban's intellectual sources and theological foundations from a different perspective. As previously indicated, the Taliban acquire their religious knowledge, which forms the base of their theological beliefs, within Deobandi religious schools. Moreover, the Taliban have primarily grown within a cultural milieu heavily influenced by Pashtunwali norms and values. Consequently, it can be argued that this educational framework and socio-cultural milieu have significantly impacted the formation of the Taliban's ideological foundations and theological perspectives (Katılmış & Güven, 2022, pp. 111-112; Abbas, 2023, p. 152).

However, it is essential to note that the influence of the Pashtunwali normative value system on the theological underpinnings of the Taliban is neither hidden nor ambiguous; it is evident to all. The Taliban themselves acknowledge this reality, deeming it obligatory and unavoidable. Mufti Abdul Hakim Haqqani, the current Chief

Justice of the Taliban, emphasizes the principle of the authority of mores (i.e., traditions) in Islamic shariah and jurisprudence. He underscores the necessity for a country like Afghanistan, where the majority are Afghans (Pashtuns), to uphold the essence of Afghan identity, along with the customs and traditions derived from it, as the basis for religious rulings and to pay appropriate attention to them in everyday life (Haqqani, 2022, pp. 35, 39-40).

### **3. The Taliban's Ideology and Its Fundamental Components**

The Taliban movement can be classified among religious movements that blend political fervor with religious zeal, advocating for what is known as “political Islam.” This ideology, also termed Islamism by some scholars, presents a totalitarian discourse that regards Islam as possessing a universal framework and a comprehensive plan for organizing the political, social, economic, and cultural aspects of human societies. Asserting that “Islam is the ultimate solution,” political Islam claims Islamic teachings to be the solution to all humanity’s challenges and problems. The inherent totalitarian characteristic of political Islam empowers this ideology to attribute all the disarray in human societies to their “deviation from Islam” and proclaim the establishment of an Islamic government as the sole remedy for rectifying these disorders. Drawing on a metanarrative of the “continuous struggle between right and wrong,” political Islam delineates the world’s path from the distant past to an unseen future. Based on this metanarrative, the continuous struggle between “right” and “wrong” will eventually lead to the dominance of “good” over “evil.” In this context, the Islamic government is responsible for facilitating this dominance by leading and orchestrating this sacred struggle (Salehi, 1396, p. 6).

Political Islam is not a uniform ideology; rather, it encompasses various currents such as Deobandism, Salafism, Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and Khomeinism. Of these five currents, the first four align with the theological framework of

Sunni Islam, while Khomeinism, sometimes termed Revolutionary Shiism, stems from the theology of Shiism. Fundamental differences between these currents prevent them from accepting each other's interpretations of religious propositions. However, what they all share is their inclination toward power and politics, which unites them under the umbrella of "political Islam." In essence, all these currents perceive Islam as possessing a political system and theory, striving by any means to remain in power in the name of religion. Another shared characteristic across all the currents of political Islam is their inclination toward the use of violence as a legitimate and justifiable means to achieve their lofty goals and objectives. They do not shy away from bloodshed and warmongering to consolidate the foundations of their religious governments (ibid.).

As mentioned earlier, the Taliban emerged from the tenets of Deobandism, acquiring a substantial portion of their theological teachings through tutelage in Deobandi seminaries. Since an excessive focus and inclination toward politics form the crux of these teachings, the theology of the Taliban can be regarded typologically as a form of "political theology." In this study, political theology denotes a cognitive approach that manipulates theological doctrines for political purposes, placing religion in the service of politics and interpreting foundational religious texts to facilitate the attainment of political power.

In the political theology of the Taliban, "politics" is the end, and "theological teachings" serve as the means to this end. Despite the Taliban's claim that their aim in pursuing political power is to strengthen religious values and establish "God's law" (see

Haqqani, 2022, p. 18; Zaeef, 1396, pp. 36-37), they utilize religious values to ascend to positions of power. The primary evidence supporting this claim is that throughout their quest for political power, they have disregarded many explicit provisions they deem as “God’s law,” showing no hesitation in violating religious values. Experience has taught us that, at present, they are well prepared to sacrifice any value to solidify their “Emirate's foundations.”

As previously mentioned, in political theology, politics takes precedence, relegating theological teachings to a subservient role. One significant consequence of this centrality and dominance is that political theology focuses solely on religious propositions that serve political purposes, marginalizing those without such functions. Ethics is the foremost casualty in political theology, often leading to diminishing attributes attributed to God and the Prophet within this framework. Political theology strips God of attributes that do not serve political ends and reduces the entire legacy of the Prophet to his political achievements. The evidence for this assertion is readily observable in the Taliban’s theological approach, where God is portrayed solely through qualities of “sovereignty” and “rulership,” reigning over the throne of “power,” imposing “sharia law” on humans, and elevating his true followers to represent him on the throne of “politics.” They dictate proper guidance for people, assess humans’ faith and disbelief, shed non-believers’ blood in the name of “jihad,” and enforce “enjoining good and forbidding evil” by punishing individuals for not adhering to prescribed beard length or listening to music. They close the gates of schools, universities, beauty salons, parks, restaurants, recreational venues, public baths, and similar places to women and girls, purifying the public sphere from what they deem

as the contamination of feminine gender presence, removing sedition and immorality from the society, and paving the way for the salvation of people both in this world and the hereafter.

Considering the points, the theological framework of the Taliban is not a complex organizational structure but is constituted by a few simple and identifiable components. Indeed, the fundamental elements of the Taliban's theology can be scrutinized and recognized under the following headings:

### **3.A. Excommunication**

Excommunication entails declaring a person, often a fellow Muslim, as an unbeliever. It involves accusing an individual of apostasy based on behavior or actions deemed contrary to the beliefs of the excommunicator. Essentially, excommunication involves labeling someone as an infidel. Typically, this accusation arises from expressing deviant beliefs or committing acts deemed indicative of disbelief and apostasy, often resulting in expulsion from Islam or even execution (Adang et al., 2015, p. 1).

Excommunication has a long history in Islamic thought (Adang et al., 2015, p. 2). The earliest proponents of excommunicating opponents in Islamic history were the *Khawarij* or *Kharijites*. They labeled Muslims as infidels for committing sins or adhering to other Islamic sects (Malti, 1413, p. 39). Before the Kharijites, Muslims neither excommunicated nor attributed sinfulness and immorality to each other; instead, they classified individuals based on the binary structure of belief/disbelief in Islam outlined in the Quran: Those who believed in the core tenets of monotheism,

prophethood, and the afterlife—albeit with varying interpretations—were considered within the circle of Islam, while those who rejected these principles were placed outside its circle. What the Kharijites did was disrupt the binary structure of Islam and, for the first time in Islamic history, brought the concept of disbelief into the realm of Islam, applying the term “infidel” to Muslims who were incongruent with their ideological foundations or committed sins (Izutsu, 1380, p. 40).

Although the Kharijite movement waned centuries ago and almost entirely exited the scene, the approach of excommunication persisted, and the legacy of their uncompromising righteousness never faded. Throughout Islamic history, various groups and sects have resorted to the tactic of excommunication to narrow the field against opponents and eliminate dissenters from public life. Today, excommunication remains prevalent among certain Islamic groups.

The Taliban movement is one of the groups extensively employing the tactic of excommunication to expel adversaries and opponents from the circle of Islam (Halverson, 2010, p. 124; Naimi, 2018, p. 113). It appears that the Taliban have adopted their excommunication methods from their Deobandi teachers. A glance at the teachings of some Deobandi scholars reveals their openness in issuing excommunication-related fatwas. For instance, a query has been issued to the Jamia Uloom-ul-Islamia in Karachi, Pakistan, asking:

My hat has a tall and rounded crown. My wife picked it up a few days ago and said, “What a strange bowl!” I can eat food on it.” I got angry and said, “Are you mocking the



hat?” She replied that she was not mocking and did not mean anything by it. Now, the question is, does comparing the hat to a bowl imply mockery of the Prophetic tradition? And although my wife did not intend mockery, has she committed disbelief, thus resulting in the dissolution of our marriage?

The response from Jamia Uloom-ul-Islamia was unsettling and alarming. As expected, the Jamia Uloom-ul-Islamia initially admitted that since the lady’s statement was not mocking, no ruling was derived from it. However, it further adds:

Anyone who mocks matters such as the prescribed practices of Islam, like beard, hat, attire, and Islamic veiling, not only commits a major sin but is also expelled from the circle of Islam. Hence, such a person requires a renewal of faith; if married, a renewal of the marriage contract is also necessary. (Jamia Uloom Islamia, n.d.).<sup>1</sup>

Significantly, Jamia Uloom-ul-Islamia is one of the theological sources of the Taliban movement, nurturing some of its primary leaders. It is widely acknowledged that Mullah Omar, the founder of the Taliban movement, received education there for a while, had close relations with several instructors of the institution, including Mawlana Yusuf Ludhianvi and Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai, and met Osama bin Laden, the Al-Qaeda leader, there for the first time

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.banuri.edu.pk/readquestion/topi-ka-mzaq-urany-waly-ka-hukm-144205200120/19-12-2020>.

(Rashid, 2010, pp. 91-92; Jalal, 2008, pp. 278-279; Zahid, 2018, p. 9; Yadav, 2010, p. 139). The excommunication-related fatwas issued by the scholars and teachers of this institute are too numerous to be included in this study. Therefore, the examination will be limited to one more fatwa issued by Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf Ludhianvi. In response to an individual who inquired about the ruling on mocking the beard, Ludhianvi issued the following fatwa:

Growing a beard is not merely a Prophetic tradition but an obligation. Trimming or shaving is prohibited, and a major sin. [...] Ridiculing the Prophet's tradition is not just a sin; it is a sign of disbelief and apostasy, leading a person out of the circle of Islam. (Ludhianvi, 1999, vol. 7, p. 121)

What is more astonishing is that the issuance of excommunication rulings is not limited to disbelievers in fundamental Islamic teachings but also targets those disregarding the sanctity of certain insignificant matters like beard and attire. Remarkably, such excommunication decrees are not confined to the scholars of Jamia Uloom-ul-Islamia in Karachi but extend to other scholars of the subcontinent, including Darul Uloom Deoband in India. For instance, in response to an inquiry about the ruling on mocking beard and whether such an act leads to the dissolution of a marriage contract or not, Darul Uloom Deoband replied:

Growing a beard is obligatory in Islam. The beard is one of the symbols of Islam established through numerous hadiths. The Prophet and his companions always maintained their beards. Ridiculing the beard constitutes disbelief. Mocking

any religious matter—whether obligatory, recommended, or merely a Prophetic tradition—is to insult the hadith. Our noble jurists have declared those insulting religions to be outside the circle of Islam. This act is highly dangerous, and such individuals must renew their faith. Just as a person exits the realm of faith through blasphemous speech, their marital contract (*nikah*) will also terminate. (Darul Ifta, Darul Uloom Deoband, India, 1442)<sup>2</sup>

This article intentionally selects and presents excommunication rulings centered around beards and attire to demonstrate how Deobandi scholars and Taliban leaders display an unreserved attitude in issuing excommunication verdicts and expelling Muslims for minor deviations from the path of Islam. They appear oblivious to the serious implications of such rulings, risking the lives and assets of those condemned as infidels and perhaps even legitimizing their bloodshed. Notably, the Taliban and their Deobandi teachers' reckless and unwise behavior in issuing these excommunication rulings stems from various hermeneutic and epistemic presuppositions. Among these, the most significant hermeneutical assumptions facilitating such excommunicative approaches within the Taliban and Deobandi teachers' theological frameworks are as follows:

Firstly, they establish a relationship of identity between religion and religious knowledge. Secondly, they consider all religious statements and doctrines clear, luminous, and open to meaningful interpretation. Thirdly, they deem the predecessors' interpretations

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<sup>2</sup> <https://darulifta-deoband.com/home/ur/nikah-marriage/603974>

of these statements the only correct and valid. Fourthly, they believe that due to being preserved, memorized, and transcribed by trustworthy narrators, the interpretations by the early generations have been transmitted in a connected and secure manner across generations. Consequently, they see themselves as the defenders of the predecessors' theological doctrines and the heirs to the absolute truth. Accordingly, anyone who disregards these doctrines and does not adhere to this truth will be expelled from the circle of Islam and fall into the abyss of disbelief (Haqqani, 1997, p. 146).

It should be noted that the issuance of excommunication decrees by the Taliban and their Deobandi leaders constitutes a departure from the intellectual tradition of Imam Abu Hanifa. Despite the Taliban and their Deobandi scholars' claims of adherence to the Hanafi school, their approach to excommunication raises doubts about the authenticity of this claim. How could one be a follower of Abu Hanifa and simultaneously engage in the excommunication of believers? Abu Hanifa was among the first to oppose the Kharijites and criticize the theoretical foundations of excommunication. As mentioned earlier, the Kharijites were the first sect in Islamic history to formalize the theology of excommunication, and, for the same reason, stand as precursors to the ideological interpretations of contemporary extremist movements like the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other staunch interpreters of Islam. In the Kharijite worldview, faith was conceptualized as a triangle comprising verbal confession, heartfelt affirmation, and outward actions. They considered sin and non-compliance with Shariah's practical injunctions and teachings tantamount to disbelief. According to them, whenever a Muslim was condemned for committing a sin or following other Islamic

factions, their safety and protection were forfeited, their names were listed on the Kharijites' blacklist, and they were deemed worthy of being slain alongside their spouse and children.

The Kharijites regarded their opponents as polytheists. In addition to justifying aggression against their lives and property, they deemed marriage and inheritance with them as illegitimate and considered their sacrificial animals as prohibited. The Kharijites' belief in this principle incited them to ruthlessly unsheath the sword and instigate massacres, unleashing widespread killing of women, men, children, and the elderly, engaging in bloodshed and fomenting turmoil. Malti reports that the Kharijites would brandish their swords, suddenly storm the market with a cry of "There is no judgment but for Allah,"<sup>3</sup> and persistently continue the slaughter of people until their last breath, spilling the blood of women, men, children, and adolescents. Malti's report underscores a peculiar resemblance between the behavior of the Kharijites and the modus operandi of the Taliban, ISIS, and other contemporary extremists who resort to suicide operations and sacrifice their entire existence to spill the blood of their adversaries (Salehi, 1395a, p. 6).

When confronted with the perilous and terrifying ideologies of the Kharijites, Abu Hanifa swiftly engaged in rigorous intellectual discourse, employing the force of logic to critique and refute their theological extremism. In doing so, he navigated the field of criticism and successfully negated their excommunicative doctrines. Thanks to this approach, Abu Hanifa compelled the Kharijites to taste the bitterness of ideological failure, thereby

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3. لا حكم الا لله

rescuing people's lives from the threat of the Kharijites' raised swords. Abu Hanifa's point of departure in confronting the excommunicative theology of the Kharijites lay in his presentation of a distinct definition of faith. Unlike the Kharijites, he attributed mere verbal acknowledgment and heartfelt affirmation as manifestations of faith without considering outward actions as integral to the essence of faith. The logical consequence of Abu Hanifa's definition of faith was that he did not equate sin and transgression in practical shariah matters with disbelief. Consequently, unlike the Kharijites, he refrained from wielding the sword of excommunication against sinners. Instead, he acknowledged disobedience as compatible with faith, counting the disobedient among the ranks of believers. Furthermore, Abu Hanifa believed that faith consists of recognizing and acknowledging God, as well as recognizing the Prophet and affirming "[I shall accept] whatever has come from Allah, in its entirety, without interpretation."<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, he believed adherence to what is extracted and deduced from religious teachings through interpretation is not essential for true faith. Instead, achieving faith is sufficient if an individual accepts the propositions and teachings of divine revelation without engaging in any form of interpretation. Through the theoretical framework he developed on this epistemological point, Abu Hanifa endeavored with eloquence and unwavering effort to articulate that interpreting religion as a human achievement is not inherently synonymous or homogeneous with religion as a divine affair. Consequently, in Abu Hanifa's perspective, rejecting a specific religious interpretation does not necessarily place an individual

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<sup>4</sup> بما جاء من عند الله في الجملة دون التفسير

outside the circle of Islam, nor does it lead the rejecting person toward the abyss of disbelief and atheism (Salehi, 1395b, p. 7).

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Considering the points raised above, the claims of the Taliban and their Deobandi leaders, asserting their adherence to Abu Hanifa, appear to lack a firm basis. Their excommunicative approaches seem to align more with Salafism than strictly adhering to the Hanafi school (Halverson, 2010, pp. 124-125). Furthermore, it is essential not to overlook that although the Taliban have acquired the theological foundations of excommunication through studying under Deobandi instructors, the cultural context in which the Taliban have developed has also played a significant role in reinforcing their excommunicative approach. As previously mentioned, the Taliban emerged from the Pashtunwali ethos of the Pashtun tribes. Someone nurtured within the embrace of such a cultural setting becomes acquainted, from the early stages of their lives, with the mechanisms of “othering,” “distinctiveness,” and “ideological delineation.” They learn to draw boundaries between themselves and others, creating distinctions between their values and those considered foreign. This differentiation and ideological delineation are primarily based on the dualities of good/evil and right/wrong. According to this delineation, truth becomes a capital exclusively possessed by the tribe. Consequently, the customs and traditions of the tribe become the criteria and standard for determining what is right, and anything incompatible with these customs and traditions is classified among aberrations and deviations (Salehi, 1396c, p. 5).

The tribal culture does not recognize diversity and pluralism, and it lacks openness toward different expressions of Islam found in other cultures. From the perspective of this culture, other forms of Islam are considered innovations and deviations. The authentic way of practicing Islam is condensed into the lifestyle of the tribal members.

The criteria for being considered a Muslim in tribal culture are quite straightforward, often summarized in certain customs and appearances. For instance, to be recognized as a Muslim, it is sufficient for a man to attend daily prayers at the mosque, avoid shaving one's beard, avoid wearing a suit and tie, refrain from collaborating with the government, offer the skin of a sacrificial animal and the alms of Eid to the religious leaders, and ensure the preservation of the share allocated to scholars and students during the payment of tithe and zakat. Likewise, for a woman to be recognized as a Muslim in this cultural context, it is sufficient not to engage in conversation with unrelated men, not to step outside the boundaries of her home, not to attend school, not to work outside the home, marry whomever her guardian or father chooses without objection, adhere to the etiquette of hijab and modesty, refrain from engaging in politics, obey her husband, and not fall short in her duties of homemaking, marital intimacy, and childbearing (Salehi, 1396c, p. 5).

After considering these points, one can argue that the mechanisms of “distinctiveness” and “othering” ingrained in tribal culture contribute significantly to leading individuals raised in such environments to have a greater inclination toward embracing excommunicative approaches. Therefore, it is not unfounded to



acknowledge that the birth and upbringing of the Taliban within the framework of Pashtun values, along with their education in Deobandi schools, have created a conducive environment for the proliferation of their excommunicative tendencies. Consequently, these tendencies have evolved into one of their major theological components.

### **3.B. Jihadism**

Jihad stands as one of the fundamental tenets in the theology of the Taliban. They firmly believe that engaging in jihad for the sake of Allah is a significant and obligatory form of worship. They argue that conducting jihad leads to the exaltation of the word of Allah (*Kalimat-u-Allah*) and the elevation of the Islamic Ummah. In jihad, they see the symbol of success and magnificence for Muslims, from which the Islamic Ummah derives sovereignty and prosperity. Nations that fulfill this significant obligation are deemed worthy of a liberated life, a great divine blessing. Conversely, historical realities and evidence have taught us that nations neglecting this significant and vital worship subject themselves to the chains of humiliation and servitude and fail to achieve anything beyond this (Layeha, 2010, p. 1).

The concept of Jihad in the thoughts and literature of the Taliban has undergone various stages of conceptual evolution. Initially, Mullah Omar and other founders of the Taliban movement defined Jihad as a “stand against evil and corruption” (Muzhda, 1382, p. 52; Mojahed, 1398, p. 85; Haqqani, 1997, p. 81). During this period, which coincided with the emergence of the Taliban in 1994, Afghanistan was engulfed in a vast and profound crisis. Shiite and

Sunni jihadist groups, previously united in their resistance against the Soviet occupation and its puppet regime, had now become divided along sectarian and ethnic lines. They were engaged in internal conflicts, primarily over the control of power and wealth.

As a result of these wars, Kabul had turned into a complete ruin, with thousands of lives lost and hundreds of families displaced and homeless. Governance over the territories was divided among warring factions, each seizing control of a specific region and implementing its own laws. Highways fell into the hands of bandits and various mafia groups, social cohesion shattered, social ethical standards declined, and the lives, property, and honor of the people became vulnerable. Plunder, extortion, and assaults on the lives, property, dignity, and honor of the people became widespread, and Afghanistan experienced pervasive instability, insecurity, and chaos (see Azizi, 1398, pp. 40-44).

In such tumultuous circumstances, the Taliban movement emerged with the proclaimed mission of eliminating corrupt individuals from positions of power, suppressing thieves and bandits, and rescuing the oppressed from the clutches of tyrants (Zarmati, 1398, pp. 7-11). They invoked the command found in the Quran: “And fight them until there is no *fitnah* (corruption) and the religion, in its entirety, is for Allah. And if they cease, Allah is indeed seeing what they do”<sup>5</sup>. According to their interpretation, the movement aimed to stand against the extensive malevolence and corruption spread by warring factions and establish the grounds for implementing divine Sharia (Rashad Afghani, 1399a).

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<sup>5</sup> Al-Anfal, 39.

Following the deadly attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the concept of "Jihad" entered a new phase in Taliban theology. During this phase, the Taliban redefined their jihad as a defensive war against the "occupying infidels" (Zarmati, 1398, pp. 13-16), referring to them as "Crusader occupiers" (Ahmadi, 1398, p. 25) or "warring infidels." They argued that according to the verse, "And never will Allah give the disbelievers over the believers a way [to overcome them],<sup>6</sup> and drawing upon the traditions of the Prophet, interpretations of scholars, and fatwas of jurists, Jihad becomes an obligatory duty for the inhabitants of Islamic territories when they are occupied by disbelievers (Rashad Afghani, 1399 CE). Consequently, all residents of that land, whether armed or unarmed, old or young—each to the extent of their ability—are obliged to mobilize and defend their homeland against invaders' aggression and safeguard its sanctity. Should the local population be unable to resist the invaders alone, other Muslims must come to their aid (Rashad Afghani, 1399d).

This definition of jihad was firmly grounded in theological principles and found ample legitimacy in the foundational sources of Islamic law. Leveraging these theological foundations, the Taliban launched an extensive recruitment campaign, successfully mobilizing individuals driven by a desire for religious devotion. They took up arms to fulfill their religious duty, guided by the principles of defending and liberating the country from the grip of "combatant infidels" and occupying forces.

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<sup>6</sup> An-Nisa, 141.

Given this definition, it was expected that the primary focus of the Taliban's jihad activities would be on combating what they termed as "foreign occupying forces." However, the Taliban directed most of their energy and efforts toward engaging internal elements. To justify the legitimacy of this action, they adhered to the jurisprudential principle of the sanctity of "supporting non-Muslims" and claimed that anyone collaborating directly or indirectly with the occupying infidels would be considered an enemy combatant. According to them, jihad against such individuals is obligatory, similar to jihad against infidels (Rashad Afghani, 1399b). This doctrine led to the brutal and bloody attacks of the Taliban, targeting the lives of many Afghan citizens whom the Taliban accused of collaborating with the occupying forces. The leadership, judiciary, and enforcement apparatus of the Taliban, in adherence to this doctrine, declared individuals and groups among the country's citizens justifiable targets for killing under the pretext of collaboration with "combatant infidels," thus rendering their blood permissible. Teachers instructing in government schools, clergy teaching in state-run religious schools, officials serving in government administrations, individuals arrested on charges of espionage, drivers involved in transporting goods for foreign forces, and others, were among those whom the Taliban deemed eligible for elimination (Clark, 2011, pp. 25-27). It is noteworthy that the Taliban did not perceive the killing of these individuals merely as a bloodthirsty and life-expunging behavior. This doctrine motivated them to consider the sacrifice of the lives of such individuals as one of the instances of *Jihad-fi-sabilillah*, "jihad for the sake of God." They documented the bloodiest acts of

killing in contemporary Afghan history in their jihadist record to earn the satisfaction and approval of God.

Following the signing of the Doha peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban in February 2020, the concept of jihad underwent another doctrinal transformation in Taliban theology. In compliance with the provisions of this agreement, the Taliban refrained from launching armed attacks against U.S. forces and NATO troops. However, contrary to expectations, they significantly escalated their attacks on Afghan security forces. This development sparked widespread and sharp criticisms of the Taliban both domestically and internationally.

Some religious authorities in the Islamic world acknowledged that, with the United States committing to withdraw from Afghanistan, the continuation of the war by the Taliban is not justifiable from a religious perspective. They argued that the Taliban's attacks on Afghan security forces constitute instances of sedition and Muslim killing.

In response to these criticisms, the Taliban labeled their war against Afghan security forces as "Jihad against rebels." They claimed that firstly, based on sharia, Mullah Mohammad Omar was the "Emir" of the country before the invasion of U.S. forces into Afghanistan. Fifteen hundred scholars considered among the *Ahl-I Hel-u Aqd*, "Authorities for Agreement and Contract," pledged allegiance to him, and under the banner of his leadership, legitimacy and legality were established. Secondly, even though Mullah Mohammad Omar went into hiding after the invasion of U.S. forces, he did not lose his "Religious Authority" because, according to the verse,

“And never will Allah give the disbelievers over the believers a way [to overcome them]”<sup>7</sup>. The isolation and installation of a leader are exclusive responsibilities of Muslims, and non-Muslims have no right to make decisions regarding the leadership of Muslims. Subsequently, following Mullah Mohammad Omar and based on the allegiance of the "Authorities for Agreement and Contract," the legitimate leadership has been successively transferred to his successors. Currently, the custodian of this position and the recognized Religious Emir is Sheikh al-Hadith Hibatullah. Fourthly, despite American forces imposing their puppets on the country and assigning leadership to them, this leadership lacked legitimacy. With the presence of a Religious Emir, no one else can claim leadership. According to the hadith, “If two caliphs are appointed, kill the latter of the two” (Sahih Muslim, 3/1480)<sup>8</sup>, and the hadith, "Whoever pledges allegiance to an imam, giving him the clasp of his hand and the fruit of his heart, should obey him as much as he can. If another comes to dispute him, strike the neck of the latter" (Sunan Abi Dawood, 4/97)<sup>9</sup>, all categorizing the one who challenges the leadership as a rebel and transgressor. Therefore, engaging in war against such an individual becomes obligatory (Rashad Afghani, 1399 AH).

Following the collapse of the Ashraf Ghani government and the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, the concept of jihad has assumed new dimensions within the theological framework of this group. At this stage, the Taliban have outlined two new objectives for their jihad mission. Firstly, they acknowledge that their jihad

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<sup>7</sup> An-Nisa, 141.

<sup>8</sup> Sahih Muslim, 3/1480.

<sup>9</sup> Sunan Abi Dawood 4/97.

does not conclude with the departure of the Americans from the country. They assert that as long as they do not establish an Islamic government and implement God's law in Afghanistan, it is not permissible to take a step back from the fortress of jihad (Haqqani, 2022, p. 18). Secondly, the Taliban leadership has instructed their commanders to "don their armor" and prepare themselves for "transnational jihad" to establish sharia law worldwide (Behesh, 1401).

The Taliban's steadfast commitment to transnational jihad signifies their leaders' endeavors to expand their collaboration with the Al-Qaeda organization, a long-standing strategic ally. Through this broadened partnership, they aim to advance their jihadist objectives on a more extensive scale, extending to far-reaching dimensions. In pursuit of these goals, the Taliban seek to foster an environment conducive to the revival of the caliphate.

### **3.C. Implementing Sharia Law**

The core tenet ascribed to the Taliban's theology revolves around the enforcement of divine law or the implementation of Sharia law. They assert that the primary goal of their jihad is to "implement Quranic and Sunnah laws" in Afghanistan, drawing upon the interpretations of early generations and jurists. According to the Taliban, Afghan people inherently desire the implementation of Sharia, as they have been Muslim for generations and cherished Islamic principles. Consequently, they claim that the Afghan people reject any legal system other than Islamic teachings. Furthermore, the Taliban believe that the early Muslims achieved greatness through the implementation of sharia, emphasizing the

need to discard foreign solutions and embrace Sharia's comprehensive principles to restore the glory of their predecessors (Haqqani, 2022, p. 24).

Among the foreign solutions the Taliban oppose is adherence to man-made laws, which they view as conflicting with Islamic foundations. They argue that the invalidity of man-made laws is evident in the Quranic, Sunnah, and scholarly consensus. Abdul-Hakim Haqqani, the current Chief Justice of the Taliban, states in his book "The Islamic Emirate and Its System" that God commands His servants to follow Sharia, forbidding obedience to anything contrary to it. Therefore, whoever chooses a law other than shariah falls into the trap of idolatry, as per the ruling of the Quranic verse, "But if they do not respond to you—then know that they follow their desires. And who is more astray than one who follows his desire without guidance from Allah?"<sup>10</sup> Such individuals are counted among the followers of tyrants and are classified among those whom God describes, in three verses of al-Ma'idah, as disbelievers, wrongdoers, and transgressors: "And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed—then it is those who are the disbelievers."<sup>11</sup> "And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed—then it is those who are the wrongdoers"<sup>12</sup> and "And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed—then it is those who are defiantly disobedient"<sup>13</sup> (Haqqani, 2022, pp. 25-27).

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<sup>10</sup> al-Qasas, 50.

<sup>11</sup> al-Ma'idah, 44.

<sup>12</sup> al-Ma'idah, 45.

<sup>13</sup> al-Ma'idah, 47.



Opposition to man-made laws in Afghanistan is not a contemporary phenomenon; rather, it has a century-old history. This opposition first gained momentum when Shah Amanullah initiated the modernization of Afghanistan's legal system, undertaking an extensive reform program through widespread legislation across various social, economic, political, administrative, military, and judicial domains. Before this initiative, Afghanistan's legal system predominantly relied on Sharia law, jurisprudence, and fatwa-oriented principles. Judges and jurists, guided by the king, formulated legal rulings based on Sharia law, with disputes resolved accordingly. The *Saraj al-Ahkam*,<sup>14</sup> which continued to be enforced in the early years of Shah Amanullah's rule, was one such compilation designed under the command of Amir Habibullah to serve as the foundation for legal judgments and decrees. However, this compilation, heavily drawing from various texts such as *Durr al-Mukhtar*, *Radd al-Muhtar*, *Fatawa Alamgiri*, *Fatawa-i Qazi Khan*, *Bahr al-Raiq*, and *Khulasat al-Fatawa*, failed to align effectively with the social and political conditions of post-independence Afghanistan and could not adequately address the tangible needs of Afghan society. Following its independence, Afghanistan found itself as an isolated and underdeveloped nation grappling with numerous challenges. These challenges included international isolation, fragmentation of the social system, pervasive ethnic, religious, and gender discrimination,

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<sup>14</sup> This book, originally intended to be published under the title *Ziya al-Ahkam* (attributed to the formal title of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, *Ziya' al-Millah wal-Din*), was authored during the reign of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan. However, before its publication, Amir passed away. During the rule of his son, Amir Habibullah, the book was eventually published under the title *Saraj al-Ahkam fi Ma'amalat al-Islam* (attributed to the formal title of Amir Habibullah, which was *Saraj al-Millah wal-Din*).

administrative and financial corruption, tax evasion by the elite, nobles, and tribes, a class-based military structure, widespread ignorance, and extensive illiteracy. To tackle these issues, Shah Amanullah initiated the drafting and approval of various laws, fundamentally transforming Afghanistan's legal landscape. The laws introduced during Amani's government were numerous, comprising approximately 100 titles, as reported by historians (Emir Amanullah Khan, 1378, p. 246).

The formulation and enactment of these laws posed a threat to the position and authority of the clergy, as the legal system was inherently rooted in Sharia principles and jurisprudence, predominantly monopolized by religious leaders. The institution of the clergy played a prominent role in the development, interpretation, and adaptation of laws and fatwas, with legal concepts and fatwas often articulated in Arabic, necessitating the indispensable assistance of this institution. Consequently, the clergy wielded unprecedented authority, exerting extensive and far-reaching influence over governmental structures. This authority reached its zenith when the clergy engaged in collusion with the institutions of power (rulers) and wealth (merchants, landowners, and feudal lords), augmenting their influence through partial interpretations and biased applications of the law and fatwas, thereby enhancing their coercion and wealth.

However, with the transformation and restructuring of the legal system, the judiciary emerged from the exclusive sphere of the clergy, and civil courts supplanted the jurisdiction of religious courts. It was no longer necessary for people to resort to the clergy to resolve their disputes or to understand the law and fatwas.

Amanullah's laws were written in the native language and a manner accessible to the “common understanding.” According to Amanullah, the “general public” could refer to the law themselves and become aware of their “rights” without the need for the apprehension and assistance of the clergy. Moreover, the clergy could no longer collude with the authorities and wealthy figures to ascend the hierarchy of law and fatwas, thereby enhancing their coercion and wealth. It was because Amanullah did not structure the laws to safeguard the “interests of specific individuals, families, governments, officials, princes, and others in power.” Instead, the purpose of the laws was directed towards ensuring the “welfare, prosperity, and tranquility of the poorest and most helpless stratum of the population” and to “curtail the hands of oppressors and aggressors from the heads of the oppressed and the destitute” (Subman, 1370, pp. 53-54).

The clergy expressed concern and apprehension regarding Shah Amanullah’s actions. Viewing the establishment of new laws by the Shah as a direct challenge to the centuries-old authority of the clergy, they perceived the jurisprudential apparatus to be under severe threat, with the channels of influence and impact of the clergy becoming unusually stagnant and unproductive. Consequently, they raised objections to the laws enacted by Emir Amanullah, using religious grounds to legitimize their opposition. They resorted to Islamic law to articulate their dissent and highlighted alleged contradictions between the enacted laws and the provisions of Islamic jurisprudence. The clerical establishment aimed to impede Amanullah from pursuing his legal reforms through any necessary means, seeking to maintain the juridical system grounded in the jurisprudential framework that served as

the guarantor of their continued dominance. In their indictment presented during the *Loya Jirga* (Grand Assembly) of 1303 (1924), they vehemently denounced Amani laws, characterizing them as incompatible with Sharia and founded upon weak and deviant traditions. They urged Amanullah to revert to his previous approach of administering governmental affairs according to established Islamic jurisprudence norms and regulations (Katib, 1303, p. 111). The critique by a present cleric in the *Loya Jirga* regarding Amanullah's failure to present a novel approach within the legal framework of Afghanistan is expressed metaphorically. The cleric urges him to return to the Quran, implying a departure from contemporary legal structures. The cleric asserts that:

Some modern thinkers falsely perceive that worldly affairs and political issues are not addressed in the divine Quran. They mistakenly advocate for the necessity of creating new laws and fresh regulations, oblivious to the fact that all specific and general matters are encompassed in the pure Quran. [English translation of Quranic verse:] All knowledge is in the Quran, but men's understanding falls short of it" (Katib, 1303, p. 111)

The clerics' opposition to the enacted laws ultimately culminated in the overthrowing of the monarchy under Shah Amanullah. The resilience displayed by the clergy in this struggle further fortified their self-confidence and motivated them to intensify efforts against secular laws, advocating instead for the implementation of Sharia laws. Through this episode, Afghan clerics became convinced that the pinnacle of their authority could only be sustained upon the foundation of "implementing Sharia." Despite

Afghanistan experiencing numerous vicissitudes after the overthrow of Amanullah, undergoing significant fluctuations and extensive transformations over time, the mindset of the clergy in this country remained untouched. The fact that approximately a century after the fall of the Amani monarchy, the Taliban still fervently oppose secular laws underscores the Afghan clergy's belief that the continuity of its authority and legitimacy is contingent upon perpetuating the call for "implementing Sharia." Consequently, they are unwilling to retreat from the bastion of the "Mulla-i-Lang" at any cost.

From this perspective, it is not unwarranted to assert that the Taliban's insistence on the call for "implementing Sharia" has a utilitarian and power-driven motivation. Contrary to their claims, seeking divine happiness and eternal fortune is not their priority. The Taliban are solely focused on acquiring and maintaining power, and the call for "implementing Sharia" serves as a means that facilitates their pursuit of this end. It provides them with the means and motivation to eliminate their adversaries, using the pretext of "opposition to Sharia" and "hostility to divine decrees" in the most aggressive manner possible. Furthermore, the emphasis placed by the Taliban on "implementing Sharia" has deep cultural roots. As previously indicated, the Taliban emerged from Pashtunwali culture and have deeply integrated themselves into this tribal culture. A comparative analysis of Pashtunwali's values and Sharia principles reveals a remarkably close affinity between the two. A cursory examination reveals Sharia and Pashtunwali side by side along a narrow border, intertwining closely like intertwined strands of hair. With the interpretation and reading of the religion that the Taliban presents, the degree of affinity between

Sharia and Pashtunwali increases to a level that readily allows us to speak of their inseparable connection. The Taliban interprets Sharia in a manner that aligns and harmonizes with the values of Pashtunwali. In essence, Sharia, as interpreted by the Taliban, is reduced to a set of strict and unyielding fatwas—fatwas that constitute the core of Pashtunwali values.

The Taliban's theological emphasis on consolidating Islamic laws and avoiding man-made laws has fostered a pessimistic and disdainful view toward democracy among adherents of this ideology. Abdul Hakim Haqqani, the Chief Justice of the Taliban, vehemently denounces democracy as a "system of ignorance and imported infidels," considering adherence to democratic mechanisms as a departure from the governance of God. Drawing on Ibn Kathir's statement under the verse "Do they seek the judgment of the time of ignorance?"<sup>15</sup> he implicitly suggests that anyone endorsing democracy steps outside the realm of Islam and falls into the abyss of disbelief. According to him, as long as one does not refer to the judgment of God and His Messenger, jihad against such individuals becomes obligatory (Haqqani, 2022, pp. 74-76).

However, it is worth noting that the Taliban's denunciation of democracy as infidelity is not a novel discourse, and almost all leaders of their Deobandi ideology share a similar stance. Figures such as Mawlana Muhammad Idris Kandehlawi, Qari Taib Qasmi, Mufti Mahmood Hasan Gangohi, Mufti Ashraf Ali Thanwi, Mufti Rashid Ahmad, Mufti Mohammadi Yusuf Ludhianvi, Mufti Ashiq

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<sup>15</sup> al-Ma'idah, 50.

Ilahi Bulandshahri, and Mufti Taqi Usmani are among the Deobandis who have categorized democracy as a form of disbelief (Moiwaya, 2013, pp. 27-28). Of particular note is Mufti Muhammad Yusuf Ludhianvi's perspective on democracy. He metaphorically refers to democracy as the "greatest idol" or the contemporary idol of the era and metaphorically designates those who advocate for Islamic democracy as, implicitly, idol worshippers (Ludhianvi, 1999, pp. 189-190).

### **3.D. Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil**

The doctrinal principle of "enjoining the good and forbidding the evil" is considered pivotal within the theological framework of the Taliban. The Taliban regards this doctrine as not only significant but also superior in importance and virtue to the concept of Jihad in the path of Allah. Mullah Noor Mohammad Saqib, the current Minister of Haj in the Taliban administration, designates implementing the doctrine of "enjoining the good and forbidding the evil" as a sufficiency-presumed obligation. In *Badr al-Fatawi*, he underscores that if an individual commits an undesirable act in the presence of a group, and someone from that assembly refrains from that act, the responsibility is thereby discharged for all. However, if no one reacts, all become complicit in the transgression. Furthermore, he contends that the scale of virtue for enjoining the good surpasses that of jihad. To substantiate this claim, he refers to the following narration: "In comparison to jihad, all righteous deeds are like a drop in a vast and expansive ocean; and all righteous deeds, including jihad in the path of Allah, in

comparison to enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, are like a drop in a deep and boundless ocean” (Saqib, 2012, pp. 409-410).

To implement the doctrine of "enjoining the good and forbidding the evil," the Taliban has established an extensive and independent administrative apparatus within the framework of the ministry. This ministry is recognized as one of the key institutions of the Islamic Emirate and is tasked with carrying out activities in line with promoting the “enjoining of the good” and eradicating the “forbidding of the evil.”<sup>16</sup> However, it is worth noting that the ministry’s focus on forbidding evil outweighs its emphasis on promoting the good. The actions deemed evil by the Taliban primarily include practices such as trimming or shortening beards, raising and grooming head hair, listening to music, women’s leaving their homes without a Sharia-approved escort, the simultaneous presence of men and women in recreational places, and women riding bicycles or taxis without a male relative. To eradicate these perceived evils, the Taliban resort to various punitive measures, including flogging or imprisonment. The determination and execution of these punitive measures do not necessarily require the verdict and approval of a judge; other qualified individuals within the Taliban's ranks are also authorized to express their opinions and act in this regard (Saqib, 2012, pp. 199-200).

Many actions deemed "evil" by the Taliban fall within the realm of jurisprudential interpretation, or *ijtihad*, as there is no definitive textual evidence regarding their prohibition or permissibility.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://mopvpe.gov.af/dr>



Consequently, Muslim jurists have held varying opinions on these matters. For instance, concerning the permissibility of music, no explicit Quranic verse or well-established hadith exists that provides clear guidance. Consequently, prominent scholars such as Abu Hamid Ghazali and Ibn Hazm consider listening to music permissible, while others deem it impermissible (Qaradawi, 1997, pp. 262-264). Similarly, there is no definitive textual evidence regarding the trimming of beards. This ambiguity has led to diverse opinions among scholars, with some considering beard trimming strictly forbidden (*haram*), others viewing it as disliked or *makruh*, and yet another group regarding it as permissible or *mubah* (Qaradawi, p. 86).

These issues are not classified within the domain of evils because early jurists and scholars, in the face of controversial issues and juristic reasonings, engaged in a facile approach and did not apply the principle of "forbidding evil" to these issues (Ibn al-Nahhas, 1987, pp. 42 & 113). Given this, the inclusion of these matters in the category of evils by the Taliban, besides being unwise, lacks conformity with the conduct of early jurists. Moreover, while besmirching the honor of a believer and jeopardizing their life is unequivocally forbidden (Qaradawi, 1997, p. 298), there is no definitive evidence to establish the unequivocal prohibition of the mentioned controversial matters. Therefore, when the Taliban detain and punish someone for what is colloquially referred to as transgressions, the sanctity of which is not established, they effectively become perpetrators of a forbidden and grave sin themselves due to their assault on the honor and life security of an innocent individual.

The implementation of the principle of "enjoining good and forbidding evil" provides the Taliban with the opportunity to extend their influence across the fabric of our lives, seizing control of all personal and societal affairs. It allows them to meticulously dictate and shape the intricacies of our behavior and conduct. The arbitrary and intrusive interventions of the Taliban not only encompass the public sphere of our lives but also encroach upon our private domain. Virtually no aspect of our lives remains untouched by the Taliban, as they engage in infringement and overreach in nearly every facet under the pretext of enjoining the good. They scrutinize all our actions meticulously on the scale of permissible and impermissible, issuing judgments of enjoining and forbidding. Interestingly, many of these interventions, rather than solely stemming from the definitive mandates of Sharia, have their roots in the cultural norms of Pashtunwali. According to Pashtunwali culture, actions such as trimming or shortening beards, women's movement outside the home, immodest behavior by women, not wearing a hat or turban, and so on are considered reprehensible. According to this culture, an ideal individual refrains from these reprehensible actions. Therefore, it is not unfounded to assert that the Taliban, through implementing the principle of "enjoining good and forbidding evil," seeks to extend the reach of their cultural ideals by exercising political power.

### 3.E. Gynophobia

Gynophobia, denoting the fear of women, constitutes a notable element within the theological framework of the Taliban. The Taliban harbors a profound aversion towards women, thereby endeavoring to assert dominion over all facets of their mobility, conduct, and actions. This apprehension towards women among the Taliban is underpinned by a pervasive adherence to "honor policing" and a conception of femininity as a potential source of "sedition." Within the cultural context of Pashtunwali, which the Taliban espouses, women are construed as custodians of male "honor." Honor denotes a sanctuary that demands perpetual safeguarding and insulation from external scrutiny. In this cultural milieu, the mere visibility of a woman to outsiders is regarded as a violation of a man's sanctity, thereby tarnishing his honor. Consequently, a man whose honor is perceived as compromised is deemed feeble and dishonorable, facing a complete erosion of social standing and political influence. Thus, men enmeshed within this cultural paradigm find themselves ensnared in an obsessive and unrelenting apprehension, persistently dreading the prospect of their female relatives engaging in unconventional behaviors, thereby risking the erosion of their honor and imperiling their social and political standing.

Furthermore, certain hadith sources categorize women as seductive and beguiling entities. One such narration asserts, "Women are the snares of Satan,"<sup>17</sup> depicting them as the traps of the devil possessed of demonic qualities. Another narration portrays women

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<sup>17</sup> *Mishkat al-Masabih*, 3/1437.

as “approaching alluringly,”<sup>18</sup> presenting themselves in a devilish guise and “then turning away like Satan,”<sup>19</sup> enticing and ensnaring men through coquetry and allure. With their charm and allure, they lead men into the trap of temptation, steeping them in corruption, indecency, and ruin. Consequently, men are urged to diligently pursue a path of abstinence and vigilantly guard against the alluring snares laid by women. It is imperative to exercise caution, lest one falls prey to women’s seductive machinations, as evidenced by the purported initial deviation of the Children of Bani-Israel: “Beware of women, for indeed, the first temptation of the of Bani-Israel was through women.”<sup>20</sup>

The convergence of honor policing within Pashtunwali culture and the portrayal of women as sources of temptation within certain hadith sources has compounded the Taliban's apprehension towards the feminine gender. This dualistic perspective has engendered an intensified fear deeply entrenched within both ideology and religion. The intimidation of women has emerged as a cornerstone in shaping their theological precepts. This fear of women has, in turn, nurtured a series of anti-feminine propositions within the Taliban's theology, as humans tend to develop enmity toward whatever they fear. Consequently, this fear has provided fertile ground for the proliferation of gynophobic sentiments within the Taliban's theological discourse, replacing the passive sense of fear with an aggressive hostility.

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<sup>18</sup> Musnad Ahmad 22/407.

<sup>19</sup> Musnad Ahmad 22/407.

<sup>20</sup> Sahih Muslim 4/2098.

The theological underpinnings of the Taliban unleash systematic oppression of women, excluding them from the public sphere and imposing gender apartheid on them. This practice delineates a rigid demarcation between male and female spheres, intending to avert any perceived blemish upon men's honor while shielding them from the pitfalls of temptation and corruption. This theological doctrine finds expression in the injunction of "confinement of women to the home," which forms the basis for the implementation of gender apartheid. According to this precept rooted in Islamic jurisprudence, women are prohibited from venturing beyond the confines of their homes except under certain prescribed circumstances, such as visiting their sick parents<sup>21</sup> or participating in the funeral rites of their *maharim*.<sup>22</sup> Upholding this juridical statement, the Taliban enforces the "prohibition of women leaving the home except when necessary" as a religious mandate aimed at safeguarding women's dignity. Women's roles are thereby confined to domestic duties such as homemaking, marital intimacy, and childbearing, with stringent limitations imposed upon their education, occupation, political engagement, and clothing choices. Abdul Hakim Haqqani, the current Chief Justice of the Taliban, extensively addresses these themes in his work *The Islamic Emirate and Its System*, which serves as the group's ideological manifesto and primary intellectual guideline. Below is a synopsis of his discourse on this matter:

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<sup>21</sup> According to the views of some Islamic jurists, in normal circumstances, when the parents of the wife are not ill, it is not appropriate for the husband to permit his wife to visit her parents (Reference: Kashaf al-Qina, Vol. 4, p. 174).

<sup>22</sup> Individuals with whom marriage is impermissible. See *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Fiqhiyyah al-Kuwaitiyyah*, vol. 19, pp. 105-110.

## Women's Education:

Haqqani dedicates multiple pages of his book to the subject of education, specifically focusing on women's education. He classifies educational disciplines into three categories: (1) religious sciences; (2) worldly sciences suitable for women, such as tailoring and medical science; and (3) worldly sciences deemed unsuitable for women, including chemistry, geometry, and related fields.

Haqqani's perspective on the first two categories suggests that women should pursue these fields of knowledge within the confines of their homes, under the guidance of their husbands or other male *maharim*. However, if, for any reason, it is not feasible to receive this education at home, women may leave their homes for educational purposes. Nevertheless, it is deemed more appropriate for their instructor to be a woman. If the instructor is a man, following the directive of the Quranic verse, "And when you ask [his wives] for something, they should be communicated with from behind a partition,"<sup>23</sup> there should be a curtain between the teacher and the female learner. Concerning the third category, Haqqani states: "Regarding sciences deemed unsuitable for women, such as chemistry, geometry, and others [...] even if they fall under obligatory knowledge, women do not have to venture outside their homes to learn them [...] because by learning these sciences from men, the burden of responsibility is lifted from everyone's shoulders, and there remains no legitimate religious necessity for women to leave home (Haqqani, 2022, pp. 253, 254, and 262).

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<sup>23</sup> Al-Ahزاب, 53.

Haqqani further examines the issue of mixed-gender education, presenting his perspective with heightened certainty and firmness. According to Haqqani, mixed-gender education is unequivocally and without any doubt considered forbidden (*haram*). He cites the Quranic verse, "And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition,"<sup>24</sup> to substantiate his claim. Notably, this verse was revealed concerning the Prophet's wives, instructing believers to communicate with them from behind a curtain in moments of necessity. Haqqani underscores that although the wording of the verse is specific to the Prophet's wives, its ruling encompasses all Muslim women across all eras and will continue to dominate until the Day of Judgment (Haqqani, 2022, pp. 263-264). However, it should be noted that Haqqani himself is not the originator of this viewpoint, as many scholars from the Deobandi school of thought, considered influential and followed by the Taliban, also hold a similar position, deeming simultaneous education of girls and boys in the same location as forbidden (see Mufti Rashid Ahmad, 1425, vol. 8, pp. 32-33).

## **Women's Employment:**

Haqqani strongly emphasizes throughout his treatise that a woman's optimal place for tranquility and comfort lies within the confines of her home, highlighting that her departure from the domestic realm and subsequent interaction or engagement with unfamiliar men are deemed religiously forbidden. He contends that such actions, whether directly or indirectly, render a woman susceptible to temptation. To substantiate his perspective, he cites

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<sup>24</sup> Al-Ahzaab, 53.

the pronouncements of Mufti Kifayatullah Dehlawi, a distinguished scholar within the Deobandi tradition and one of the founders of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind. Haqqani references Dehlawi's assertion that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) proscribed women from attending gatherings of men and society at large. The Prophet encouraged women to observe their prayers within the privacy of their homes rather than taking their prayer mats near the door, in the courtyard, in the neighborhood mosque, or perhaps in the central mosque, signifying that the closer a woman remains to the interior of her dwelling, the more preferable and virtuous it is deemed. Additionally, the Prophet advised against women accompanying funeral processions. Dehlawi further elucidated that women are discouraged from leaving their homes for unnecessary reasons, accentuating that "As a vulnerable entity, all woman's body are intimate parts, and when she steps out, Satan seeks to expose her to men. She is closest to the countenance of her Lord when she is in the depths of her home"<sup>25</sup> (Haqqani, 2022, pp. 154 & 271-272).

Regarding women's employment, Haqqani delineates human employment into three distinct categories:

(1) Delegation Ministers: This designation entails entrusting the governance of state affairs to a delegate appointed by the Khalifah. Drawing upon Mawardi's pronouncements in *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyah*, Haqqani asserts the exclusivity of this role to men,

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<sup>25</sup> It means a woman is entirely intimate. Whenever a woman goes out of the house, Satan presents her to the eyes of men, and staying inside her home brings her closer to God's satisfaction.



contending that women are precluded from attaining such a position.

(2) Implementation Ministers: Occupying an executive role tasked with executing the directives of the Khalifah and his deputy, individuals in this capacity do not partake in formulating major governmental policies. Again, Haqqani references Mawardi's interpretation, which deems the appointment of women to this position incongruent with religious precepts.

(3) Employment within Ministries or Offices: Haqqani acknowledges that women's employment in administrative roles within ministries or offices poses no religious issue. However, he maintains that should women be compelled to leave their homes for work and function within mixed-gender environments, their employment becomes religiously prohibited (Haqqani, 2022, pp. 275-279).

In essence, while Haqqani does not outright negate women's employment, he imposes numerous restrictions that effectively impede their participation in the workforce. He concludes his stance as follows:

Based on the preceding, women's collaboration with non-*mahram* men in the workplace is not permissible. Any explicit or implicit encouragement for this under the pretext of contemporary necessities and civilization's requisites is an extremely perilous matter that leads to bitter consequences and grave implications. It contradicts the religious texts that command women to stay home and attend to household duties. It is evident that Allah has

granted women a distinct and different structure from men and has designated tasks for them that occur within the confines of the home and among their gender. It implies that by entering the domain designated for men, a woman steps out of her prescribed structure and nature, committing a grave sin that destroys her spirituality and fractures her personality. May God protect us from the evil of such transgressions! (Haqqani, 2022, p. 280)

## **Women's Participation in Politics:**

Haqqani maintains that politics constitutes an exclusively male domain, proscribing women from entering this sphere. According to the Taliban's Chief Justice, women are devoid of the right to select an *Imam* (leader) or ascend to the position of *Imamate* (leadership). Haqqani asserts,

Throughout Islamic history, women have never been vested with the right to choose a leader, and historical records do not indicate women's involvement in consultations or participation in selecting a Khalifah after the Prophet's demise. No historical evidence exists of female companions advising Khalifahs as men did. Women have never been witnessed alongside men managing state affairs or leading political-military matters. Historical accounts merely depict the Prophet receiving allegiance from some women without shaking hands with them. (Haqqani, 2022, pp. 148-149)

The Taliban's Chief Justice underscores that women's presence during the Prophet's expeditions does not signify their engagement

in political affairs. Instead, they were situated in separate tents to attend to the wounded and provide water. Haqqani contends that interpreting these events as political activity is a misreading of history. According to Haqqani, even Aisha's involvement in the Battle of Jamal cannot be construed as evidence of women's political engagement. He argues that Aisha was positioned on a camel within a curtained howdah, concealed from view, and emerged to mediate peace between the armies of Ali and Muawiyah, devoid of aspirations for leadership or military command (Haqqani, 2022).

Accordingly, Haqqani situates politics within the realm of male activities, demarcating a rigid boundary between "femininity" and "politics." By precluding women from participating in significant political decision-making, he further solidifies the males' exclusive hegemony in matters of governance. Haqqani emphasizes that women are inherently designated for household chores, childbearing, and child-rearing duties, thereby relegating the management of external affairs, including politics, exclusively to men (Haqqani, 2022, p. 151).

### **Women's Clothing:**

Regarding women's attire, as Haqqani and other Taliban members believe, the fundamental principle dictates that women remain within the confines of their homes and refrain from entering the public sphere, designated as the domain of male activity. However, should a legitimate religious necessity compel a woman to depart from her home, her attire should be devoid of adornments, non-transparent, loose, and concealing. She must refrain from using perfume, eschewing luxurious accessories and jewelry, and present

herself modestly when outside to prevent men from falling into temptation and being led toward indecency and corruption (Haqqani, 2022, pp. 255-259).

## Summary and Conclusion

The Taliban movement, in terms of typology, can be categorized among religious movements that possess political fervor in their minds while carrying the zeal of faith in their hearts, thus advocating "political Islam." On one hand, the Taliban largely emerged from a culture influenced by the Pashtunwali normative system. On the other hand, they are steeped in Deobandism, adopting most of their theological doctrines through tutelage under Deobandi scholars. This combination of educational foundations and socio-cultural environments has molded the Taliban's theological teachings into a distinctive form. As excessive focus and concern for politics constitute the essence of these teachings, the theology of the Taliban can be seen typologically as a form of "political theology."

In political theology, politics takes precedence, and theological teachings become subservient, serving as instrumental tools. A significant outcome of this centrality and subservience is that political theology solely attends to religious propositions serving political purposes and sidelines those that lack such functionality. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to assert that the theology of the Taliban is not a complex and intricate doctrinal system. Instead, it comprises a few simple tenets and elements facilitating their ascent to power and politics. These elements include Excommunication (*takfirism*), jihadism, Sharia implementation, enjoining good and forbidding evil (prohibited), and fear of women. The Taliban selectively prioritize and interpret these propositions in a way that eases their path toward power.

Consequently, they instrumentalize theological teachings for political motives while relegating many teachings devoid of such potential to obscurity.

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ABDUL KABIER SALEHI, born in 1983 in Herat, Afghanistan, is a dedicated researcher with a profound interest in Critical Islamic Studies. Currently pursuing a Doctorate at Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University, Salehi's research delves into various dimensions of Islamic thought, culture, and society through a critical lens.

Salehi, a prolific writer with five books and numerous research-analytical articles to his name, offers critiques of political Islam, extremism, and radical interpretations of Sharia, while also advocating for post-Islamism, through his analytical works on underlying dynamics of religious thought and action.

Driven by a dedication to advancing knowledge and fostering understanding in his field, Salehi's academic pursuits reflect a rigorous approach to critical inquiry within Islamic Studies. Drawing upon both traditional Islamic education and modern academic methodologies, Salehi continues to make significant contributions to the scholarly discourse surrounding Islamic thought, including its societal and political manifestations, particularly those influenced by radical movements and trends.

In the Taliban's theological framework, God is portrayed solely through the attributes of "sovereignty" & "rulership," reigning over the throne of "power," imposing "sharia law" on humans, elevating his true followers to represent Him on the throne of "politics" and act as His representatives. They dictate proper guidance for people, assessing individuals' faith and disbelief, shed non-believers' blood in the name of "jihad," and enforcing the "enjoining of good and forbidding of evil" by punishing individuals for not adhering to prescribed beard lengths or indulge in listening to music. Furthermore, they close the gates of schools, universities, beauty salons, parks, restaurants, recreational facilities, public baths, and similar venues to women and girls, aiming to purify the public sphere from what they deem as the contamination of feminine presence, thereby removing sedition and immorality from society and paving the way for the salvation of people in both this world and the hereafter.

