# Atif Mian and postsecular anxiety

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The political and philosophical fallacies in arguments that attempt to blame political secularism for discrimination against religious minorities must be contested because they remain a diasporic academic indulgence

**Several commentators have tried to make sense of the expulsion of Atif Mian from the government’s Economic Advisory Council for being an Ahmadi.** **Critics worried if all the PTI policies would now privilege faith over professional merit while others shared personal testimonies on what it means to be Ahmadi in Pakistan.** The most disingenuous analysis however, has been [Sher Ali Tareen](http://tns.thenews.com.pk/beyond-religious-bigotry-secular-freedom/)’s attempt to blame political secularism for discrimination against religious minorities (Published on these pages last week under the title *Beyond religious bigotry and secular freedom)*. Below, the political and philosophical fallacies in Tareen’s argument are discussed.

**Political slippages**

**Firstly, the reason for Atif Mian’s expulsion was not, as Tareen suggests, “his identification with the Ahmadiya community” (it’s not a football fan club or an ethnicity) – but the fact that he *is* an Ahmadi. Atif Mian’s unapologetic claim of his faith reflects his personal conviction. It is a prerogative that he is free to hold in America where his religious or ethnic minority status has not denied him professional success or due respect.**

**Second and inexplicably, Tareen praises the PTI government’s original inclusion of Atif Mian in the EAC as an example of Islamic “hospitality”, no less! Asking this world-renowned expert to volunteer to help Pakistan solve its economic crisis was apparently, extreme generosity on our part and not a rational choice nor secular necessity.**

Despite acknowledging the PTI’s “inability to handle pressure” from the religious lobbies, Tareen absolves them and instead makes the liberal compulsions of the modern state liable for the government’s surrender**. But the decision to expel Mian was on the direct advice of the Ulema and a populist concern to not offend religious ‘sensitivities’. By no measure is the PTI a secular party but it may be said that the rational or neutral decision to select members was motivated by a secular impulse while Atif Mian’s subsequent removal was a conscious faith-based decision.**

**Third, Tareen’s suggestion that the expulsion of the Princeton economist will injure the moral and electoral standing of Imran Khan and the PTI government is baffling. A week before the expulsion, the PTI government had formally lodged a protest with the Dutch against the blasphemous cartoon competition and claimed moral victory over its eventual cancellation. The expulsion of Atif Mian was just an extension of the same reasoning, that is, privileging the injured sentiments of Pakistan’s majoritarian Sunnis.**

**Why would Tareen think that the PTI’s siding with the aggrieved majority would undermine the moral standing of the party rather than benefit it? Moreover, how in the world would it cause “electoral injury” to the PTI when Imran Khan canvassed the elections in favour of the *Khatam-e-Nabuwwat* issue and, the neophyte Labaik Party garnered massive votes with its single-point, anti-Ahmadi agenda?**

**Repeatedly and ironically, it is the critical thinking secularists who are scolded by post secularists for not debating the virtues and creating binaries by criticizing religious politics.**

Is there a sense of betrayal to be detected here in Tareen’s own (liberal?) hopes that the PTI has lost moral ground because it chose to uphold the majoritarian religious sentiments at the expense of the persecuted minority? Whose morality has the PTI offended except that of the ‘liberal’ Muslims?

Political slippages aside, Tareen’s philosophical analysis is even more problematic.

**Humpty-Dumpty logic**

Like other post 9/11 post secularists, Tareen is anxious about “mullah bashing” in Pakistan. In his view, religious bigotry is not the cause of “violence (physical or otherwise) against religious minorities and exacerbate[d] majority/minority tensions” but instead, it is the “irresolvable contradictions of political secularism” that are responsible.

**Farzana Shaikh questions the “humpty-dumpty definition of secularism” when reviewing Humeira Iqtidar’s thesis which argues that the Jamaat Ud Dawa and Jamaat-e-Islami are the true secularists of Pakistan. Using the same reverse logic, Tareen considers the agents of religious discrimination and hate for Ahmadis to be the liberals/secularism and not the defamed mullahs/Islamisation.**

Tareen argues against some “universal feature of political secularism” – as if all societies experience secularism in a coherent and linear manner – and as if Islamic history, traditions and treatment of minorities have been inherently cohesive but also, heterogeneous, adaptive and perfect. In such analyses, secularism is permanently tainted but religious canon is only flawed by worldly exegesis and political misuse under modernity.

Tareen argues that the state cannot be neutral because it creates the divisions between majority and minorities. He blames the modern liberal nation-state for religious inequalities and ignores the rights-based contributions of the anti-slavery, socialist and feminist movements. The implication is that pre-modern religious doctrine is singular in its commitment to the equality of genders, classes and minorities. However, to qualify for protective status, as Tareen’s respected Ulema will confirm, minorities must agree to be dhimmis and not full and equal citizen. This qualifies as the same “necessary exclusionary calculus” that Tareen says only applies to liberal governance.

Based on the works of Habermas, Taylor, Casanova, Asad and others, post secular theory runs on the premise that secularism is not the opposite or antidote to religion. Ironically, Pakistani secularists for decades have been arguing the same when Islamists accuse them of being *la-deen*. Binaries are not constructed by one side only. The flippant suggestion that Pakistan is some secular state that “regulates and manages religion in accordance to liberal political governance” collapses when we consider how difficult it is to locate this “governance” since every law, policy and behaviour is scrutinised, resisted and penalized for perceived lack of compliance with the spirit and letter of Islam.

Commentators like Tareen are invested in debunking the term ‘fundamentalism’ but then resort to using references like, “liberal fundamentalists”, making it a tiresome contradiction not worth further discussion.

**Tareen’s core diagnosis is that Atif Mian’s fate was not sealed due to “religious zealousness and the absence of secular virtue but precisely the opposite, the centrality of a secular political rationality that exacerbates and intensifies majority/minority tensions and violence.” However, no party involved in the Atif Mian affair denies the success of the religious zealots in influencing the government’s decision to appease the sentiments of the majority. There was no referendum on this matter – only a ‘democratic’ consensus triggered by the memory of the 2017 occupation of Faizabad in Islamabad by Khadim Rizvi and which translated overnight into a full-fledged political party, the TLP.**

The decision to resist the Labaik movement last year earned the PML-N government much electoral damage, a law minister who had to resign and an assassination attempt on the planning minister. Maybe this does not qualify as “zealous” in Tareen’s vocabulary but regardless, resisting the Khatam-e-Nabuwwat or blasphemy law lobbies is not just some form of ‘liberal governance’ – it is deadly business.

Repeatedly and ironically, it is the critical thinking secularists who are scolded by post secularists for not debating the virtues and creating binaries by criticizing religious politics. But if there’s one thing that Pakistani liberals are guilty of, it is their incessant debating and dithering and not taking clear secular stands. It is arguments such as Tareen’s that foreclose the scope of debate by ignoring the many examples of secular resistance and by insisting that all answers must be framed around religion and represented by the competitive ‘Ulema’.

Post secularists like Tareen do not see or value the low-brow every day influential circuits of debate and contestations found in popular culture, mainstream media and at council levels across Pakistan. Post secular scholars purposefully dismiss the attempts by human rights activists in Pakistan to negotiate with faith-based politics. They refuse to acknowledge that there is no risk-free space or neutral site for any critical questioning of religious issues.

An honest assessment would mean first accepting the Punjab-centricity of the **Khatam-e-Nabuwwat and blasphemy issues. It is also critical to recognize that the attacks on Ahmadi neighborhoods, authorized desecration of Rabwah graveyards, and attempts by zealous judges to brand Ahmadis with identifiable names cannot be simply dismissed as politically motivated because they are driven and justified by religious inspiration. Only then can we realize that with successful waves of Islamisation, a more indigenized problem has developed and is staring at us squarely. For these reasons, post secular analysis remains a diasporic academic indulgence rather than a responsible and meaningful scrutiny.**

[**http://tns.thenews.com.pk/atif-mian-postsecular-anxiety/#.W6caO9cza1s**](http://tns.thenews.com.pk/atif-mian-postsecular-anxiety/#.W6caO9cza1s)

**Supreme Court overturned Shriat Court’s decision of declaring Arabic as a compulsory subject.**

**Punjab government challenged that decision**.

Rawalpindi (Monitoring Cell) Bench comprises of 2 members and led by Justice Mashir Alam did hearing of Punjab government’s petition regarding overturning of Shriat Court orders. Lawyer of Punjab government, Qasim Chohan stated that Shrait court didn’t have an authority to make such decisions. There is a difference between matters and worships. Matters cannot be implemented strictly while worships can be implemented. After hearing the arguments Punjab government, bench accepted the appeal and overturned the orders of Shariat Court.

**(Daily Jung Lahore, 20th September, 2018)**

**Those found guilty of blasphemy will receive death penalty: Electronic media bill presented before senate**

**Defamation of the Holy Quran will result in life imprisonment, three years sentence for degradation of the religious personalities, and four years jail for those who prepare obscene material.**

**Qadianis who will pose as Muslims and preach their faith will face three years imprisonment and a penalty. An 18 grade officer will hear the cases. Bill presented before the senate for further assesment.**

Islamabad (Special correspondent of sight, INP): An amendment bill 2018 has been proposed in the senate to stop the crimes committed on the electronic media. The bill states that those who would defame the Holy Quran on the social media will receive a life sentence. Those who would be acquitted for blasphemy and those who would accuse others falsely of the same crime, both would receive death penalty. It is suggested that those who would degrade religious personalities would also face a three year sentence. Qadianis who will pose as Muslims and preach their faith will face three years imprisonment and a penalty. A four years jail has been prescribed for those involved in the preparation of obscene material on social media alongside three hundred thousand rupees fine. Those found spreading this material will be fined two hundred thousand rupees along with three years of imprisonment. Minister of State for Revenue, Hammad Azhar, presented the bill before the senate. According to the bill, anyone who would hurt the sentiments of other religions or spread obscene material pertaining to those religions would receive up to ten years of imprisonment or fine or both aforementioned. Those who would desecrate the Holy Quran will face the life imprisonment. Those found guilty of blasphemy will receive death penalty alongside the fine. Defaming religious personalities may lead up to three years of imprisonment or fine or both. The wrongful use and defilement of holy places, personages, titles and certain scriptures will receive up to three years of imprisonment with fine. Qadianis who will pose as Muslims and preach their faith will face three years imprisonment and a penalty. Death penalty is suggested for those who wrongfully accuse others of blasphemy. An 18 grade officer will hear the cases. A four years jail has been prescribed for those involved in the preparation of obscene material on social media alongside three hundred thousand rupees fine. Those found in the distribution of this material without the legal reasons will be acquitted of the crime and fined two hundred thousand rupees along with three years of imprisonment. Presiding officer senator Sitara Ayaz has forwarded the bill for further assessment to the concerned committee.

**Daily 92 News Faisalabad, Thursday, 20 September, 2018**

**We would call an APC against the government decisions and Qadiani Activities.**

**The current government has driven the country in crises from the beginning; the PM is trying to befriend India.**

**The country is being deceived by the name of “State of Medinah”, we would not accept the amendment of curriculum in Madaris in the name of reforms: Press Conference.**

Islamabad (correspondent, Monitoring Desk, Sabah News) the head of Jamiat Ulema e Islam Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman announced that a meeting of APC including all the religious parties on the account of the government decisions and ever increasing activities of Qadiani network, he further said that the policies of current government are driving us in crises, the amendments in the curriculum of Madaris would not be accepted in the of reforms. We cannot expect good from this fake government in a press conference. The reviewing of the CPEC would decrease the confidence level of China in Pakistan. The postponement of the CPEC would be a mighty blow to the economy of the country.

**(Daily 92 News, Tuesday, 11 Sept 2018)**

**We would call a combined meeting of all the religious parties on the matter of Khatm e Nabuwat, Qadianis and the status of Madaris (religious schools). Fazl Ur Rehman**

**Due to the political turmoil China is losing its confidence in us. If CPEC got delayed or cancelled, it would not be good for the economy.**

Islamabad (INP) the head of Muttahida Majlis E Amal, and Jamiat Ulema e Islam Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman said talking to the media Pakistan China friendship is converted in to a financial relation. We would call an all parties conference. They should not be deceiving the people by invoking the name of “the State of Medina”. He further said that the status of Madaris is being diminished, and we would gather the nation on the issue of Qadianis and bring them on one platform.

**(Daily Pakistan, Lahore. (12) 11 September 2018)**

**The Finality of the Prophet hood is a matter of faith and Holy Quran, the Qadianis should be removed from the key positions. Namoos e Risalat Confrernce**

**The Time has arrived that so-called freedom of expression should be reined in; the government should present the perspective of Muslim Nation on the matter of Khatm e Nabuwat in United Nations.**

**In Mina Atif case a committee should be formed for further investigations. Maunawwar Hussain Jama’ati, Governor Punjab, Pir Abdul Khaliq, Pir Irfan Mashadi’s Address.**

Lahore (political reporter) under the auspices of the central chairman of the “Khatm E Nabuwat Global Alliance” and “Anjuman Khuddam Ul Sufiaa Ameer Millat Trust”, a Khatm e Nabuwat Conference was held in a local hotel, the honourable guest was Governor Punjab Chaudhry Sarwar and other leaders were there. No Muslim can sit silently on this matter and this so called freedom of expression should be controlled.

**(Daily Ausaf, Lahore, Tuesday, 11 September, 2018)**

**92 news Faisalabad, Tuesday, 11th Sep, 2018**

**Appointment of Qadianis on key positions is unacceptable. Saleem Gujjar**

**Qadianis are an instrument of foreign powers, and their plotting against the country is no secret, Mohammad Bilal and others.**

Faisalabad (City Reporter) the head of Jama’at Islami Halqa P115 Chaudhry Saleem Gujjar, Gen Sec Mohammad Bilal, Mian Iftikhar Ali, Yusuf Gul Paracha, Mian Ajmal Hussain Badar Advocate, Usman Anwar Jutt and others said that Qadianis have always weakened the roots of Pakistan by being the instruments of foreign powers. They are open enemies of the beloved Homeland. The appointment of Qadinis on key positions in the country which was founded on the premise of Kalima Tayyaba cannot be accepted. They should be dismissed immediately and stopped from traitorous activities against Islam and Pakistan.

**92 news Faisalabad, Tuesday, 11th Sep, 2018**

**No space for Deniers of 'Nabowat' in Pakistan. Rizwan Ahmad**

**Dismiss the information minister Fawad who called Pakistani nation the Terrorists.**

Okara (bureau report) Ameer Jamat-e-Islami district Okara Chaudhary Rizwan Ahmad demanded to disengage the Qadiani missionary Atif Mian from economic counsel whereas he stressed to dismiss the information minister Chaudhary Fawad on calling Pakistani nation the extremists. There is no space for the Deniers of' Nabowat in Pakistan. Government in its 1st month shows its acts of caressing for Qadianis.  He expressed these thoughts during his press conference. He said that Fawad Chaudhary insulted the nation for criticizing the appointment of Atif Mian. Every Muslim who loves Holy Prophet (PBUH) is against this appointment. Fawad Chaudhary himself is liberal extremist. It is not known for whom he works; PTI or Qadianis. On defense day, he presented his salute to martyrs who were martyred either for the defense or for the loyalty to Pakistan.

Daily Ausaf Lahore, Friday, 7th September, 2018