



Competing Visions of Humanity: Sufi Humanism and Militant Absolutism

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Abstract

Islamic thought paradoxically addresses human dignity. Two competing moral anthropologies within Islamic intellectual discourse, Sufi mystical ethics and militant extremist absolutism, are examined in this article. It argues that these traditions approach human rights and dignity differently. This study draws upon classical Sufi metaphysics, modern political theory, and contemporary case studies of ISIS, Al-Qaida, Taliban and Pakistani TTP to understand the violence patterns. It demonstrates that Sufi ethics grounds human worth in an expansive ontology of divine mercy and unity. In this way, Sufi ethics generates an implicit universalism compatible with modern human rights frameworks. On the Contrary, militant extremism places a human value on ideological conformity and constructs a conditional and exclusionary anthropology. Such an extreme dispensation negates universal dignity. This study contributes to contemporary debates on human rights and religion, particularly Muslims, who have received many weird tags despite having the most convincing and logical faith today and ever. This paper seeks to reframe extremism not merely as political violence but as a radically different vision of what it means to be human.

Keywords: Sufism; Militant Extremism; Moral Anthropology; Human Dignity; Political Theology; Mystical Ethics; Counter-Extremism.

1. Introduction

The contemporary global landscape is increasingly defined by a profound struggle over the ontological status of the human person within Islamic thought, where the definition of humanity often oscillates between an inclusive spiritual identity and a restrictive ideological membership. This semantic distinction serves as the foundation for a moral anthropology in which the Sufi tradition views every individual as a unique epiphany of the divine reality. In contrast, militant absolutism restricts the category of the truly human to those who demonstrate ideological conformity through specific acts of sacrifice or political allegiance.

Philosophical thought has revolved around the question of humanity more than anything else since time immemorial. Aristotle, in his *Politics* (1998), found humans to be rational and political beings. For Kant, a person is an end in themselves, and they do not need to search for their destiny anywhere outside. On such perceptions and assumptions, civilisations have built their moral and political orders, the legitimacy of power, and the architecture of law. Human rights discourse, in its modern form, presupposes that dignity inheres in every person by virtue of being human. However, this presupposition is neither self-evident nor historically uncontested. It rests upon a particular moral anthropology.

Islamic thought considers the question of humanity to be neither peripheral nor derivative. It begins at creation. The Quranic narrative of Adam presents the human being as a supreme creature, destined to lead on earth as vicegerents of the Creator (Quran 17:70). Humans have been animated by divine breath and appointed as vicegerents on earth. Chapter 2, verse 30 of the holy Quran reads: “Indeed, I will place upon the earth a successive authority (khalīfah)...” Verse 34 of chapter 2 further elaborates in these words: “And when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam.’” The supremacy of humanity in the Divine scheme is because of the responsibility that humankind committed to bear. This scriptural anthropology establishes a framework where honour precedes community and responsibility accompanies freedom.

However, traditions of interpretation have complicated this simplistic logic of humanity by developing different readings, versions and narratives of this inheritance. This is why the debate over the Islamic roots of human rights cannot be confined to geopolitical issues, civilisational rhetoric, and narrative-control mechanisms. The contrast between Sufi mystical ethics and militant absolutist ideology reflects deeper disagreements about the nature of the human person. The former draws upon Quranic themes of mercy, unity, and shared origin to articulate a universal dignity grounded in being itself. The latter constructs a hierarchical anthropology in which worth is conditioned upon allegiance and doctrinal conformity. This difference is not ontological or tactical; it is conceptual and visionary. The philosophical history of the human person and the original primary source of Islam can inform how competing anthropologies continue to define the moral horizon of human society and civilisation. This is the paradox; this article seeks to traverse it.

1.1 Research Question

How do Sufi mystical ethics and militant extremist ideologies conceptualise human dignity and rights, and what do their competing moral anthropologies reveal about inclusion, exclusion, and violence in contemporary Islamic discourse?

1.2 Thesis

Sufi mystical ethics grounds human dignity in an ontological universalism rooted in divine unity and mercy, thereby converging with contemporary human rights norms, whereas militant absolutism constructs a conditional, exclusionary conception of humanity that structurally negates universal rights.

Methodologically, this study employs doctrinal research and comparative philosophical analysis, supported by historical and contemporary case studies of Takfir, represented by Extremists, and Tasawuf (wahdat al wajood), embraced by Sufi mystics, as two competing, conflicting, and contradictory moral anthropologies of the human person, dignity, and rights. The benchmarks of this analysis will be the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad as the sources of Islamic extremists and Sufi mystics. This study seeks to clarify which of the two aligns with the sources and which violates their dicta, thereby determining their violent, pacifist, or humanitarian nature.

1.3 Expected Contribution to Existing Literature

This unusually interdisciplinary paper integrates Islamic metaphysics, political theory, human rights philosophy, and studies of contemporary extremism within a coherent framework of moral anthropology. Existing literature studies extremism through the lens of political grievances, institutional failures and crisis of identity and belonging (Roy, 2004). This study identifies compelling conceptions of what it means to be human within the intellectual discourse of Islam. It contributes to contemporary Islamic scholarship, human rights, and extremism. It shifts the analytical focus from geopolitical and socio-economic explanations of radicalism to the deeper philosophical question of moral anthropology by comparing and contrasting Sufi metaphysical humanism with the violent absolutist ideology of extremists.

This article introduces a novel framework for analysing extremism as an anthropological reductionism, which subjects human dignity to ideological conformity in contrast to the Sufi doctrine of pantheism (Wahadat al Wajud) or the unity of existence, which articulates an ontological universalism, grounding human dignity in divine unity and mercy.

Therefore, this study advances the literature in four ways. First, it reframes and reconceptualises extremism as a conflict between competing moral anthropology, not merely political ideologies. Second, it aligns contemporary human rights discourse with Islamic metaphysics. Third, it projects the Sufi Intellectual tradition as a form of pluralistic coexistence and a counternarrative to violent extremism. Lastly, this paper argues that the Sufi narrative and vision of human dignity are closer to and more aligned with the sources, such as the Holy Quran, the Prophet's Sunnah, and authoritative classical Islamic scholarship.

2. Literature Review

Contemporary scholarship focuses mainly on geopolitical and socio-political factors of radicalisation, and this appears to be more a matter of media narratives playing a leading role rather than the facts on the ground, filtered through exhaustive research. The metaphysical foundations of the moral anthropology of human dignity and human rights, which can better gauge the worth of the human person and of life, remain unexplored, leaving the gap to be filled.

This research addresses that void by investigating how the Sufi doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud creates a theological barrier against the binary logic of Takfir, which extremists utilise to strip "others" of their ontological sanctity. Furthermore, while traditional security studies emphasise the role of institutional failure, this inquiry shifts the focus toward the "unitive" versus "exclusive" epistemologies that determine whether a believer perceives the religious 'other' as a manifestation of God's names or as a void devoid of legal and moral protections.

Through a thorough investigation, this study traces the metaphysical roots of the holy Quran and the behavioural reflections of the code of conduct as expressed by the Prophet of Allah, both in war and in peace, regarding the recognition, respect, and appreciation of human dignity. The Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet form the primary sources, as do the works and poetry of great Sufi philosophers, such as Ibn Arabi, Jalaluddin Rumi, Shah Latif Bhitai Sarkar, Baba Bulley Shah, and others, that align with the human dignity discourse. In addition to these legal documents, including Meesaq-e-Madina and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this paper's theoretical base will also be anchored by them.

Sufi texts and philosophy demonstrate how the theories of microcosm and macrocosm interact to distinguish 'the mystic power of love' from 'the militant love of power'. It is a search for a tale of minor cosmic harmony to the rhetoric of alienation, hatred and violence found in extremist narratives (Mir, 2024). Sufi worldview and vision ultimately frame violent extremism as a symptom of spiritual

crisis in which “others” are taken as outsiders and not a manifestation of the Divine. This attitude leads extremists towards deeper radicalisation, aggressive intolerance and moral collapse (Suleimenova et al., 2022).

This research also evaluates how Sufi praxis, through tangible acts of charity and service to all humans regardless of creed, functions as a practical extension of this metaphysics, contrasting sharply with the “internal logic” of extremist groups that utilise a bifurcated worldview to categorise individuals into binary camps of “believer” and “infidel” (Rafudeen, 2023). This exclusionary worldview is countered by the Sufi principle of “social mysticism,” which promotes altruism and non-violence as effective means of elevating human dignity and fostering a civil society grounded in tolerance for diversity, difference and coexistence.

What determines the worth of a human person is described as moral anthropology. Intellectual traditions in different times make different assumptions about the nature, status, and worth of persons. Such assumptions ask what a human being is and what he or she can claim or should be. Such a study or discourse that focuses on the scope, limits and significance of human dignity and human rights can formulate human moral anthropology.

The trajectory of human worth dates back to human creation as the privileged and distinct creature of God, well documented in revelations, particularly the Holy Quran. In his last sermon, the Prophet Muhammad made it clear to humankind that no human being is superior to another on any ground except for those who are pious and cause no harm to other humans and beings. The relevant points read: “All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also, a white has no superiority over black nor does a black have any superiority over a white, except by piety and good action.”

However, the modern human rights movement, beyond religious versions, dates back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which many of its advocates celebrate as their invention. However, most advocates know that respecting all those rights is not for them, but for others. The opening article of the Declaration affirms that ‘all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (Preamble). This claim is normative, legal and philosophical because it posits an intrinsic anthropology of human rights.

Article 1 reads: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Article 3 states: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of a person.”

Article 5 guarantees protection through justice and the rule of law in these words: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

The legal and moral anthropology as projected by UDHR, adopted by the UNGA in 1948 in response to the world’s deadliest conflict known as World War II, which claimed over 60 million lives, prohibited inhuman and degrading treatment of humankind on whatever grounds. It marked a new era in international relations and world history, yet against all normative idealism, realpolitik continues to eat into its vitals in the guise of veto and the doctrine of imminent threat.

Charles Taylor (1992) argues that legal and moral claims of human rights are embedded in what he terms “the politics of recognition” and its moral grammar, in which the denial of recognition causes real harm and consequences because identity is the first step toward dignity. Recognition is

justice, not courtesy. Refusal to accord others equality in status and equal opportunity violates personhood.

Hannah Arendt (1951) sees it differently. In her critique of totalitarianism, she argues: “the destruction of rights begins with the destruction of the juridical person and culminates in the annihilation of the moral person”. Aligning rights with political membership rather than with inherent humanity undermines human rights through the instrument of what she calls “statelessness”. Arendt, therefore, holds that inherent dignity should take precedence over political recognition.

The philosophical articulation of human rights clarifies moral anthropology as an indispensable condition for any discussion of human rights. Philosophers of human rights argue that a system that considers human dignity as inherent will protect and propagate it universally, whereas the system that treats it as derivative is prone to condition human rights. The distinction is decisive; it determines whether minorities, dissenters, and outsiders possess an inviolable standing or remain vulnerable to revocation. Moral anthropology, therefore, underwrites the architecture of inclusion or exclusion.

In Islamic thought, the holy Quran asserts that “Allah has honoured the children of Adam.” It further narrates the blessings of Allah, communicating that ‘whatever is there on the earth and heavens, Allah has created for humankind’. The children of Adam are none but humankind. Classical scholars debate the scope of this honour and articulate ‘breathing divine spirit, making vicegerent on earth, making them beautiful and epitome or miniature of entire universe, making His best creatures like angels and also Jins to bow before Adam and classifying his beloved, Muhammad PBUH as mercy for all universes and creatures, to be from the family of Adam as the distinctive features of humanity. In Islam, human dignity is universal and inalienable, integral to faith.

Sufis and mystics view human life as a blessing of God, sacred and inviolable, a part of one existence that is the only real existence, and rest is “nothing other than nothing.” Ibn Arabi formulated this doctrine as *wahdat al-wujud*, meaning “there is no god but God.” He further articulates in his *Futuh al-Makkiya* and in *Fususul Hikmah* that accepting any other existence is tantamount to ascribing partners to Allah, which the holy Quran describes as *Lazum-azeem*, meaning the gravest of all sins that humans can commit in their worldly lives. Jalaluddin Rumi further explains this in his poetry: I am nothing. If you want to meet me, meet me there as a whole, not in separation. Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai also picked up Rumi’s line that if you want to meet your Lord and creator, there is one way to eliminate ego and forget self, and then you become whole. Latif Sain says “kill your I and Me” (*main khy maar*). The concept of Iqbal’s *khudi* is also the same, but with a different name. *Khudi* should not be confused with arrogance; it signifies the moral uplift of the self towards piety and human service.

Sufi metaphysics in all religious traditions reveal that dignity is not conferred by community, but it is inherent and bestowed by God. It is inscribed in existence. Such an ontology resonates with universal human rights. Intrinsic worth, rather than contingent membership, is central to both Sufism and humanism. The mystical emphasis on mercy as a governing attribute of the divine further expands the circle of moral concern. Mercy is not selective; it is universal, enveloping creation.

On the contrary, militant extremist ideologies portray the opposite view of human dignity. Theirs is a different moral anthropology. If we take the example of *jehadi* normativity and value system relating to human dignity and life, we will find a different pattern of product. Here, sociologist Herbert Cooley’s “significant others” become really “significant” as well as “others”. What entitlement of rights extremists claim for themselves, they deny to others. All these rights, as enumerated in the last sermon of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and also emphasised in the Holy Quran and modern UDHRs, are exclusively for extremists, not for anyone who differs with them or

their ideology. The Holy Quran clearly declares that “there is no compulsion in religion” and God prohibits Muslims from talking ill of others’ gods. These messages from the holy Quran and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) assert that the freedom to profess religion is an inherent right associated with human dignity. No one can impose faith or cause any forcible conversion, nor can they forcibly displace people of different faiths that we call today as minorities from their homes and hearths. That was the reason why Prophet Muhammad signed the Treaty of Hudaibiya with the people of Makka, who were pagans, and entered into a social contract with the Jews and Christians within the constitutional framework known to us as the Meesaq-e-Madina, or the Charter of Madina. This example suffices as an argument that human dignity takes precedence over religious beliefs and that humanity comes first.

If we take the example of extremist and terrorist organisations today, we will find that their messages, practices, values, manifestos, worldviews, and visions run counter to the true humanitarian spirit of Islam. Islam prohibits violence and orders the killing of what the holy Quran describes as “Fasadis” or “Sharpasand” in Urdu.

Olivier Roy (2004) argues that modern political radicalisation produces contemporary jihadism. It is not produced by classical jurisprudence. Alienation, identity crisis, sense of belonging, and globalised fragmentation create most of the violence in the name of faith as a religious duty. Gilles Kepel (2002) maintain that opposition and exclusion cultivate the movements of identity, defining themselves against secularism, pluralism, and Muslim moderation. This approach stratifies humanity. The anthropological implication clearly shows that human wrath is indexed to ideological allegiance. The doctrine of excommunication becomes a vehicle for refusing recognition. In such an ideological dispensation, rights lose everything; they neither remain inherent nor universal. This state of affairs creates a self-defeating, chaotic normativity and moral anthropology that are conditional on conformity.

This conditional anthropology corresponds clearly to what Arendt identified in totalitarian regimes. Her identity and belongings become mediating and determining factors of the worth of humans. The community stands alienated and unprotected. The others become suspects, enemies, and liable to be eliminated. becomes ontologically suspect. The deprivation of recognition justifies violence. The problem acquires the political dimension of violent extremism, and it reconfigures the essence of humanity and humankind, where the entire burden of responsibility and accusatory propaganda falls on none other than religion. So was born the phenomenon of what the West describes as Islamophobia.

Contemporary human rights discourses reflect shared humanity and stand beyond politics and theology. However, Muslim thought shows paradox and competing divergence between Sufism and Salafism, while Islamic ideas on intrinsic human dignity are coherent. Sufi thinking and doctrine project closer proximity with genuine and original Quranic moral anthropology in contrast to the exclusionary and divisive political orientations and formulations by different interpretive perspectives held by extremist ideologies, which are explicitly at odds with human dignity and its worth. Salafi views, therefore, convert humanity from a shared ontological condition to a gated moral category.

3. Methodology and Results

3.1. Extremism as Reversal of Islamic Ethics

Conceptually, this study considers extremism as the reversal of the normative and ethical foundations of Islam. The holy Quran repeatedly and vehemently condemns corruption, falsehood, terror, disorder, injustice, chaos, and unjust violence. The Holy book declares it “Fasad fi al-ard” (فساد فى الارض). This phrase appears in the holy Quran at two places, where it not only condemns these acts

but also reveals who spreads violence and why, and directs people in authority on what to do with them. Before I share the verbatim of these verses from Sura Maida and Sura Baqra, let me add that the first interpretation of Fasad occurred when Fitna al Khwarij emerged during the time of the fourth caliph, Hazrat Ali, who implemented Sura Maida on them while they claimed and pretended to be what Sura Baqra said.

Arabic:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ

(English Translation with Sahih International)

And when it is said to them, “Do not cause corruption on the earth,” they say, “We are but reformers.” (Al-Baqarah: 11)

Surah Al-Maida (Verse: 33) lays out the counterplan for “fitna and fsad” in the following Arabic words, followed by an English Translation.

Arabic:

إِنَّمَا جَزَاءُ الَّذِينَ يُحَارِبُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَيَسْعَوْنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَسَادًا أَنْ يُقَتَّلُوا أَوْ يُصَلَّبُوا أَوْ تُقَطَّعَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُمْ مِنْ خِلَافٍ أَوْ يُنْفَوْا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ ذَلِكَ لَهُمْ خِزْيٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَلَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

(English Translation with Sahih International)

“Indeed, the penalty for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive upon earth [to cause] corruption is none but that they be killed or crucified or that their hands and feet be cut off from opposite sides or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a disgrace in this world; and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment.” (5:33)

The holy Quran considers life sacred. It includes the lives of everything and is not confined to anyone, let alone to who belongs where and what they believe! There are only two conditions where humans have permission to take life: first, in self-defence, and second, in the course of justice. However, Islamic jurisprudence and fiqh show that neither of these rights belongs to the individual but to the state, to be exercised through a rigorous due process of law. Sura Al-Isra, Verse 33 reads: “Take not life which Allah has made sacred, except in the way of justice (bil-haq)” Justice is the job of the state in interpretative scholarship. Similarly, Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 190 provides: “Fight against those who fight against you; transgress not because Allah loves not the transgressors.” This implies that fighting against transgressors is way different from becoming a transgressor. Only your self-defence can authorise you to do so when all other options, such as mediation, negotiation, talks, etc., are impossible.

3.1.1 Case Study ISIS: Violence as Sacred Purification

a. Takfir and Universal Violence

ISIS declares explicitly that “unbelievers and others, including Muslims who do not follow and support them, deserve to die.” Scholarship on extremist narratives demonstrates that ISIS divides the world population into two camps: They and Us, meaning true believers and enemies whose killings become justified, according to their sermons. Their texts institutionalise excommunication (Takfir) and expand it beyond classical Islam, including Sufis and moderate Muslims who support human dignity, rights, democracy, civil governance, and nationalism. These practices and narratives run counter to what the Holy Quran and the Prophet have emphasised about human dignity and rights.

Holy Prophet said, “If a Muslim calls another unbeliever, it returns upon one of them.” (Saheh Muslim)

The Holy Quran, at various places, has prohibited coercion in matters of faith, ensuring freedom to profess one's chosen faith.

b. “There is no compulsion in religion”

(Surah Al-Baqarah: 256)

Arabic:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۚ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

(English Translation Sahih International)

There shall be no compulsion in religion. The right course has become clear in contrast to the wrong one. So whoever disbelieves in false objects of worship and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.

This verse explicitly prohibits coercion in matters of faith and affirms freedom of belief.

c. “With you is your religion and with me is mine”

Surah Al-Kafirun (109:6)

Arabic:

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

(English Translation Sahih International)

“For you is your religion, and for me is my religion.”

This verse reflects peaceful coexistence and the principle of religious non-interference.

d. “Do not insult their gods lest they insult Allah”

(Surah Al-Anam:108)

Arabic:

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدُوًّا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۖ كَذَلِكَ زَيْنًا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ ۗ عَمَلُهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

(English Translation Sahih International)

And do not insult those who invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus, We have made pleasing to every community their deeds. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them about what they used to do.

This verse establishes a clear principle of tolerance, restraint, and respect for others' religious sensitivities.

In contrast to Quranic injunctions and Prophetic practice, ISIS propaganda and narrative justify enslavement and ritualised brutality. For example, ISIS operational command in Syria enslaved Yazidi women and children brutally and divided them into fighters. This practice, ISIS justified as a firmly established doctrine of Shariah, which was not in line with the light of the holy Quran and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, classical Sufi jurists rejected this practice outright. Some Muslim scholars even went further to declare this as a revival of slavery in the modern context and violative of Islamic ethics.

Moreover, violence remained a religious obligation and a strategy for the ISIS ideology and manifesto. These militants framed killing as a sacred duty essential for the purification of this worldly

life from disbelievers and dissenters. According to some reports, ISIS killed 98 per cent of Muslims, declaring them as disbelievers. The insights from the case study of ISIS reveal that, though portrayed as an exalted campaign of purification, the spectacular killings no longer remained part of defensive war (Jihad) as articulated in Islamic thought, but became a kind of apocalyptic theatre of an unabated and uncontrollable violence.

3.1.2 Al-Qaeda: Globalisation of Violent Jihad

a. Killing Civilians Declared Religious Duty

If we look at Al-Qaida's view about violent Jihad, we can find Osama bin Laden authorising the killing of all persons whom he thought were anti-Islam. He thought and justified "killing of civilian and military persons from the enemy camp as the duty of every Muslim." This declaration, according to many classical Islamic scholars, flies in the face of Islamic Law, the Quranic concept of defensive war and the holy Prophet Muhammad's conduct in Gazwats because the Islamic law of war prohibits the killing of non-combatants, women, children, religious scholars and leaders. Traders, diplomats and emissaries.

Secondly, these terrorist organisations have killed more innocent Muslims than their so-called enemies. Research on Al-Qaida, both in the Muslim and Western world, has revealed with unwavering consensus that "Most of the victims of Jihadi violence have been largely Muslim populations." Classical Islamic scholarship declared such unbridled violence "anti-Islamic innovation by terrorists to acquire legitimacy for their violence (Bidah). Neither the holy Quran nor the Practice of the Prophet and his rightly guided companions endorse this. Critics go still farther, declaring this violence as plantation of the enemies of Islam to weaken the normative and moral foundations of Islam and to provide an excuse to the enemies of Islam as license to kill Muslims with impunity, as they have been doing in Kashmir and Palestine, as if international law treats Muslims differently from the rest of the world.

3.1.3 Taliban Ideology: Sanctification of Armed Force

Like Al-Qaida and ISIS, the Taliban's doctrine of violent extremism justifies the use of violence as obligatory and legitimate. To be specific, the following table identifies the shift from classical Islam to militant absolutism.

SERIAL	CLASSICAL ISLAM	TALIBAN IDEOLOGY	VARIABLES	RESULTS
1.	Defensive Jihad	Offensive and Violent Struggle	Nature of Jihad	Change definition
2.	State authorization	Individual declaration	Authority	Change authorization
3.	Transgression prohibited	Transgression allowed	Mode	Shift Modus Operandi
4.	Mercy and human dignity	Cruelty and sanctity of violence	Worth of life	Transform anthropology
5.	Target military fighters	Target innocent civilians	target	Change the rules of conduct

In the context of Pakistan, much documentary evidence is available reveal with unmistakable clarity that TTP carried out sustained suicide bombings, targeted killings, retaliatory attacks, sponsored by Afghan Taliban and Indian proxies in the region against the state of Pakistan, and sectarian violence campaigns. The latest being the Islamabad attack on the Shia Imambargah this January, killing over 40 Muslims. These violent activities stand in direct contradiction to the Quranic injunction, which reads: "Do not kill yourself; Allah is Merciful to You." (Quran 4:29)

3.1.4 Findings and Results: Core Patterns of All Extremist Movements

The above analysis of the original sources of Islam and the practice of extremist movements shows two common things.

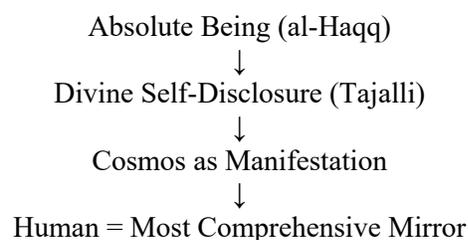
1. All interpret Islam in a way that conflicts with classical Islamic scholarship, violating the fundamental sources of Islamic instructions: The holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet.
2. Extremists hardly care for faith and its image but focus on power and politics to gain control and subjugate everyone who comes in their way of the so-called sacred mission of purification of Islam.
3. Extremists create and project their own ethical justification of killing non-combatants, children, women and the elderly and in many cases abuse children and women sexually also.
4. In doing so. Al-Qaida, ISIS, Taliban, and TTP have a common culture and structure of ideological violence.
 - i. All have selective scriptural extraction that suits their terror empire, and therefore they universalise the concept of offensive Jihad rather than the defensive one as explained in the Quran or use interpretation as an instrument to justify indiscriminate killing and extremist violence.
 - ii. All expand Takfir excommunication as a weapon to declare opponents as apostates and their leadership as legitimate (imams) leaders to have religious authority to order anything, including killing and violence.
 - iii. All disguise political power pursuits and territorial controls in the name of Allah and behind theology or Shariah to build what they call “Caliphate”.
 - iv. All believe in the moral inversion of violence as worship.

Leading global scholars had written the signed letters to Baghdadi in 2024, declaring the systematic misapplication of Quranic verses through interpretative violence as un-Islamic, illegal, immoral, irreligious and inhumane by all means and definitions. These letters were a reminder that Islam does not allow the killing of innocents, forcible conversion, misuse of Quranic verses, excommunication (Takfir), and enslavement on whatever grounds.

3.2 Sufi Humanism

Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) systematically founded and articulated the concept of ‘Unity of Being’. He argued that existence is one, and everything else which Allah has created is His manifestations or what he called “Tajlliyat” of Divine names and attributes. Absolute being is only Allah, and His creatures are therefore derivative beings. However, a human being is the most complete mirror of divine creations and mirrors (Kamil Insan).

Ontological Structure



Thus, harming a human being is not merely social injustice; it is metaphysical blindness to Divine manifestation.

Understanding the Sufi vision and worldview is key to understanding how Sufi ethics articulates the anthropology of human dignity, which this study has found aligned with the original sources of Islam: The Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Though there are many Sufi orders founded by different Sufis over the years, their visions of humanity, existence, the creator, and practices are similar, with slight differences in their zikr, tazkiyah, fana, and lineage of guidance that trace back to Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) as the chief of all Sufi orders. All claim to be part of a broader category of Ahl-e-Sunnat without objecting to the Shia practices and differentiating between Muslims. Because all Sufis express their total allegiance to Hazrat Ali as their chief guide, and to all twelve Imams from Hazrat Ali Murtaza to Muhammad Mehdi (alai salam). Here, they differ from militant extremists who do not concur with them on imamat and Shias who do not accept the wilaya of non-imams. However, Sufis serve as a middle ground and common path in the diversified sectarian divide among Muslims, maintaining a balance. In this section, we will analyse Sufi humanism and its proximity to the original sources of Islam and their classical interpretation and scholarship.

As Takfir was the central theme of our analysis of the extremist anthropology of human dignity, here we will replace it with Tasawwuf (Pantheism) and its form of Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Existence), portraying that pure existence is one and alone Allah, and the rest is creation, which has no real existence. Everything created by Allah is indeed purposefully yet it is an illusion (Muta ul Groor, as the Quran calls it). If anyone or anything accepts any existence other than Allah, he or she ascribes partners to Him. Hazrat Ali beautifully defines and explains this unity of existence in the first Sermon on the oneness of Allah in his book *Nehjulbalaga* in these words: “True monotheism requires negating anthropomorphic imagination. Whoever describes God in physical terms limits Him. Whoever limits Him has numbered Him. Whoever numbers Him has denied His uniqueness.”

Hazrat Ali argues that “God is not a body, not confined by space, not bound by time, not subject to change.”

Hazrat Ali further clarifies unity beyond composition in these words: “God is One, not in a numerical sense. His unity is not like one object among many. He has no parts, divisions, or attributes separate from His essence. To attribute qualities as separate additions implies composition, and composition implies dependence. God is absolutely independent. Therefore, Divine attributes are not external additions; they are identical with His Essence.”

Hazrat Ali summarises that the creator is beyond the instrument and need. “Allah created without tools. He fashioned creation without a prior model. He is not in creation, nor is creation in Him in a spatial sense. He existed before time and place. Thus, creation depends on Him; He depends on nothing.”

Hazrat Ali explains still deeper: “God knows without acquiring knowledge. God acts without movement. God hears without organs. God sees without eyes. Divine action does not resemble human action. Similarity between Creator and creation is categorically denied.”

The sermon teaches the spiritual purification of belief in one, and only Allah, that true monotheism means purifying belief from subtle forms of shirk (association), rejecting mental images of God, and recognising that imagination cannot grasp the Absolute. The perfection of Tauheed is sincerity; the perfection of sincerity is rejection and negation of attributes in the sense of limiting descriptions of Allah.

3.2.1 Human Dignity in Wahdat al-Wujūd

Scholars of pantheism integrate Ibn Arabi’s metaphysical views with THE Quranic foundations. As revealed in chapter 15, verse 29 of the holy Quran, humanity carries a divine breath and spirit. Based

on this connection, Allah says He has honoured the children of Adam, meaning humankind (Quran 17:70), making human dignity universal. The Holy Quran in chapter 95, verse 4 declares that humans are His master creature, created in the best stature and therefore represent the perfect apex of manifestation.

a. Ibn Arabi

Expanding on these Quranic verses metaphysically, Ibn Arabi holds that humans are a microcosm, a copy of the cosmos, and a locus where all Divine names gather. Every person carries sacred significance; for that reason, Allah has appointed no one, other than humans, as His representative or vicegerent. To embed this concept, let us refer to Ibn Arabi's original work, Futuhat al Makkīyya, where he cites Tarjuman al-Ashwaq on the Universal Heart concept of the central status of humans in the Divine scheme of creation.

Arabic Original:

لقد صار قلبي قابلاً كل صورة
فمرعى لغزلان ودبير لرهبان
وببيت لأوثان وكعبة طائف
وألواح توراة ومصحف قرآن
أدين بدين الحب أنى توجهت
ركائبه فالحب ديني وإيماني

Translation

*“My heart has become capable of every form:
A pasture for gazelles, a monastery for monks,
A temple for idols, the Kaaba of the pilgrim,
The tablets of the Torah and the book of the Quran.
I follow the religion of Love: wherever its caravan turns,
That is my religion and my faith.”*

These poetic lines consider the human heart the leader of human existence, one that follows what Ibn Arabi calls the religion of love. Love is a decisive and determining factor because it is love which rules the heart, the microcosm of all sacred spaces and affairs. Ibn Arabi also acknowledges the diversity of faiths and leaves their choice to heart, saying, “wherever its caravan turns that is my religion.” What a beautiful expression for free will and no compulsion in religion.

What truly distinguishes humans from other creatures is their heart, which has come to take on connotations of the Divine's home in literature. I call the human heart (Qalb) a “human variable” because even machines can think, but they cannot feel and are heartless. In this context, love becomes an epistemological principle which denies exclusivist anthropology based on violence against “others”. Here are no others, no distinction of “Us and They” or vice versa, but only one truth that existence is one and rest is manifestation.

b. Jalal ad-Din Rumi

Rumi also sees Divine reflection in humanity. In his Masnavi, Rumi states the presence of Noor in humans as follows.

Persian Original:

آینه شو، جمال پری طلعتان طلب
جاروب کن خانه و پس میهمان طلب

Translation:

*“Become a mirror and seek the beauty of the fair-faced one.
Sweep the house (of the heart), then seek the guest.”*

Rumi’s lines sit well with the Quranic foundations about the distinguished position of humans in the Divine scheme of creation. These lines confirm humans as reflective beings and their dignity tied to their being a Divine manifestation. Here, there is no room at all for violence, absolutism, and exclusivism. No one can authorise violence to shatter what Allah calls a creature crafted with care, loaded with love and a mirror of His manifestation, establishing anthropological expansion rather than reduction, as is the case with extremist narratives.

Rumi consider unity of existence indivisible. Let me quote the translated poetic lines to clarify this.

“We are from the heights and return to the heights. We are from the sea and return to the sea.”

Soul never dies; it only travels and changes places and stations. Soul, as part of the greater reality, begins with Alame Arwah, a Divine place. It lives in a body where greater reality says I'm nearer to you than your jugular vein. This makes sense: greater truth is never apart from its tiniest part or its reflective mirror. When the soul leaves the body, death occurs. This signifies that the departure of the real is tantamount to the end, meaning completion of the worldly journey or death. On every death, the soul begins a new journey of “return” to Truth, and we Muslims say: “Towards ‘Allah’ is the return of all souls”. It shows that souls return where they belong, and bodies go beneath the surface of the earth. This process suggests that human origin is divine and destiny is divine as well, and therefore human identity transcends political categories; rather, it indicates sacred continuity of being.

c. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai

Shah Abdul Latif Sarkar considers humans as sacred travellers. Let us quote him in Sindhi, and then we will translate for our global audience. From Shah Jo Risalo:

Sindhi Original:

پنهجي پاڻ سڃاڻ، ته سڀ سڃاڻيندين

Translation

“Recognise yourself, and you will recognise everything.”

Latif Sarkar equates self-knowledge with cosmic knowledge. The human heart hides many secrets. Humanity carries universal meaning. Earth is not their original abode but a passage for dream and illusion. The internal human world is far deeper than the external world's width and height. Because Allah, whose existence is immeasurable, fits into the human heart an abode of love (Ishq).

d. Bulleh Shah

Baba Bulleh Shah beautifully explains the death of the ego and the collapse of false identity. His poetic lines below reinvigorated us.

Punjabi Original

ٻُڙهه ٿور سمجهاون آياں
بهينا ته بهر جا ٿياں
من لے ٻُڙهيا سر دا کيه لينا
جد عشق دا پيا پهوڙا

Translation

“Sisters and sisters-in-law came to advise Bulleh. ‘Submit to the orthodox path.’
Bulleh replied: What need have I for empty forms, when Love has struck its blow?”

These lines establish that the ultimate goal of faith worship is to find and meet the beloved. It is only through true love (ishq) that the human heart displays its spiritual artistry, immunising humans from worldly temptations and satanic desires. Bulleh Shah tells that love should always take precedence over orthodox ritualism because love is the biggest critique of clericalism. Love establishes human dignity and authenticity over sectarian and puritan compliance.

“Chal Bullya uthy chalye jithy na koi sanu jani na koi sadi zat pehchani.” Baba Bulleh Shah advises to leave the place where people know and know your genealogy because people, in order to get their work done, praise you to show a person that you are not, or if you are, then pride is another satanic weapon that Allah never likes. Bulleh Shah prefers humility, simplicity, and modesty over any cultural or moral decorum.

“Bulleya ki jaana main kaun.” Forgetting oneself to remember “Yaar” is a common Sufi connotation. It dissolves rigid identity. Yaar and Sain refer to the creator. Bulleh Shah criticised sectarian violence and clerical arrogance. Beyond caste, creed, dogma, and other contours of identity, he saw humanity. Above all, Bulleh Shah was very vocal against religious hypocrisy and the moral inversion that fuels extremism.

3.2.2 Anthropological Contrast

Now, the anthropological contrast between Sufi and Salafi visions is revisited in the following table.

Sufi Vision	Salafi Vision	Variable Component
Wahadat Al-Wajud	Extremist reduction	Size
Being is unified	Being is divided	Process
Human: Divine Mirror	Human: Ideological Label	Human
Love focused	Hatred Mobilized	Love
Unlimited Mercy	Conditional Mercy	Mercy
Tolerance for diversity	No Tolerance for “others”	Tolerance
Service of humanity	Control over Humanity	Vision/mission
Self-purification	Doctrinal Purification.	Objective
Sufi Humanism	Extremist Absolutism	Nature
Inclusive approach	Exclusive mode	Approach
Power of Love	Love of Power	Power
Hereafter, focus on fearing Allah to receive His mercy.	Worldly focus with stated aim of pleasing the group leader. Allah is taken for granted.	Allah

3.2.3 Theoretical Summary

Pantheism embeds human dignity in both moral teachings and ontology. First, it considers the human being as the most complete locus of divine self-disclosure. Second, every person is significant metaphysically. Dehumanisation becomes sin for God-fearing believers. Excommunication (Takfir) is considered ontological blindness. In Sufi culture and thought, as developed by Ibn Arabi and later elaborated by others, extremist violence violates the Quranic verses, prophetic practice, the practice of imams, ethical rules, and metaphysical coherence.

3.2.4 Result

The holy Quran ontologically roots human dignity in divine breath, moral trust, and universal honour. Great Sufi philosophers and poets such as Ibn Arabi, Rumi, Shah Latif, and Bulleh Shah translated

this metaphysical anthropology into a lived culture of love, pluralism, and mercy. On the contrary, extremist ideologies replace Tazkiyah (purification of the self) with Takfir (excommunication of others) and convert sacred dignity into political hostility, inverting the classical and original framework of Islam. The Quranic and Sufi metaphysics equate violating human dignity to rebelling against the Divine signature within humanity.

Quranic & Sufi Principle	Extremist Inversion
Humans were created in the best stature.	Humans reduced to a sectarian label.
All Children of Adam honoured	Honour is conditional upon ideology.
Mercy to all worlds	Mercy is restricted to the group.
No compulsion in religion	Forced imposition
Unity of Being	Theology of division
Love as a spiritual path	Violence as purification

3.2.5 Epistemological Difference

Dimension	Sufi Humanism	Jihadist Reductionism
Method of Knowing	Spiritual unveiling & scripture	Literalist Extraction
Focus	Inner Purification	Outer Domination
View of Difference	Divine Wisdom in Diversity	Threat to Purity
Ethical Limit	Mercy Regulates Power	Ideology overrides mercy

4. Discussion and Conclusion

4.1 Context

In Pakistan, the politics of exclusion is understood through a spiritual-inclusion approach. context is between inclusive and exclusive approaches to human dignity. Pakistan exemplifies the recurring and persistent tension between Sufi tolerance, traditions of inclusivity and religious and sectarian harmony, and militant intolerance and exclusivity. In Pakistan, Sufi shrines of Lal Qalandar Shahbaz, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Sachal Sarmast, Data Ganj Bukhsh Ali Hajweri, Baba Bulley Shah, Sultan Bahu, and many others have served as social, cultural and spiritual stations and institutions of harmony and peace. Their universal poetry depicts the unity of existence, universal humanity and global peace. These places have become centres of devotional music, communal meals, and friendly rituals for interfaith and inter-sectarian harmony and integration. Most of these Darbars attract devotees across religions and sects, emphasising divine love and shared humanity. They also provide a strong sense of belonging among the marginalised populations. These institutions demonstrate lived anthropology, in which human dignity is not transient, contingent, or conditional. Their followers use love and unity to purify their souls. They sacrifice their wealth, health, ego, honour and identity to please their lords that they believe lie in service to humankind. Sufis kill their ego in the service of Allah as *jihad fil nafs*.

On the contrary, militant absolutism in Pakistan places human dignity and worth contingent upon doctrinal exclusivity and uniformity. In their narrative, the use of force, terror, and violence is justified for the purification of faith. The kill in the name of Allah to all those who disagree and dissent. They have even targeted shrines, killing hundreds of innocent people from their own faith, let alone others. They fight to justify their self-declared rightful and legitimate authority to control populations. In 2017, TTP targeted Sehwan Sharif and killed dozens of people, all Muslims or their brothers in faith, with the pretext of heterodoxy or impurity in religious faith. C. Christine Fair (2014) was apt in observing that “militant violence in Pakistan frequently targets symbolic institutions that embody alternative religious authority, thereby attempting to consolidate ideological dominance.”

Both approaches produce different results and philosophical implications. Shrine-based culture diffuses authority among groups and networks of disciples and caretakers through decentralisation, in contrast to the centralisation of authority by militant groups that monopolise doctrinal narratives of exclusivism and violence. In Sufi culture, remembrance of mercy and forgiveness takes precedence. Inversely, in Militant culture, remembrance of control and vendetta takes the lead. Sufis embrace pluralism while Salafis consider it a threat. Attacking shrines is a strategic articulation of militants to harden the sectarian and doctrinal divide. The use of violence against their fellow Muslims reflects nothing other than a conditional and narrow anthropology that is endowed with a refusal to recognise “others” who do not agree with militants. This state is how militant absolutism translates exclusion into physical disaster, unfolding the contest of human dignity and worth.

The tension arises when dignity is subordinated to an exclusivist identity. In such cases, universality appears as dilution. Extremist movements often reject global human rights frameworks as alien impositions. However, their rejection is not primarily about cultural authenticity. It is about anthropology. If worth depends upon doctrinal purity, universal rights threaten ideological coherence. Sufi ethics grounds human dignity in experiential knowledge and metaphysical unity, and tends to widen the horizon of its recognition. On the other hand, militant absolutism narrows the scope of recognition of human dignity and worth through its conditionalism. Sufis locate honour in being. The Salafis locate it in belonging. The first makes rights superior to power. The second makes rights subordinate to power and authority, generating a serious crisis of social contracts, state authorities and the legitimacy of the rule of law.

Sufi and Salafi thinking can better be understood beyond simple binaries between secularism and religion. Complexity arises from the fact that both Sufi humanism and Salafi militant extremism use the same Islamic vocabulary and diction. Nevertheless, both mobilise those dichotomies towards anthropological destinations. The decisive question, however, remains: to what extent either party is closer to the true Islamic spirit in recognising human dignity, and which moral anthropology prevails in interpretative communities.

However, it is for sure that when honour is read as universal, rights prevail, but when honour is understood as restricted, exclusion emerges. Moral anthropology at its best can provide the tools and techniques to study their divergence. It can clarify why debates about violence and pluralism are hard to resolve at the policy level, due to the philosophical interventions in these debates. Such intervention can help traditions construct the human person and dignity in distinct ways, paving the way for a better and deeper understanding of them.

The contrast and conflict between Sufi ethics and militant absolutism are not confined to recognition itself; they extend to the struggle over whether dignity is inherent or conditional. In that struggle, the architecture of human rights hangs in the balance.

4.2 Competing Anthropologies and the Crisis of Recognition

This study has found a fundamental contest between Sufi metaphysical ethics and militant extremist ideologies over the philosophical question of moral anthropology: who is entitled to dignity and protection, and why? The evidence collected and examined here suggests that violence also has its deep roots in metaphysical assumptions regarding human worth.

In the ontological unity, Sufism grounds its vision of humanity. Accordingly, it considers every human being as a participant in the divine act of manifestation. In the Sufi worldview, therefore, every human possesses inherent, not relational or derivative dignity, which is not dependent or conditional on any doctrinal authentication. The essential metaphysical foundations of

such dignity are mercy, humility, and service to humanity, expanding the moral horizons of recognition. Harm, refusal, and condition become social injustices and metaphysical violations of what Sufi mystics describe as divine manifestation, or Tajalli.

On the contrary, this study has demonstrated that extremist ideologies exhibit reverse patterns, known as conditional anthropology. Militant ideologies prioritise ideological conformity and communal belonging over human dignity, employing the doctrine of excommunication (Takfir) against others. Others get deprived of legal and moral security and protection. When outsiders are recognised as legitimate participants in the moral community, violence becomes justifiable and permissible, redefining the category of humans in order to legitimise exclusion, reduction, violence, and annihilation.

This paradox aligns well with Hannah Arendt's philosophical insights. She argues that a person's moral and legal status is decisively instrumental to the protection of rights. In militant absolutism dispensation, the denial of recognition precedes the denial of rights, legitimising violence. However, Sufi ethics provides a metaphysical foundation for recognition. It also takes precedence over doctrinal identity and political membership. Therefore, in Sufi moral anthropology, dignity is rooted in being rather than belonging.

This anthropological difference creates far-reaching implications. Sufi wisdom articulates pluralism as a strength and diversity as a power. Different cultures, traditions, and languages coin different names of Allah, making everything inclusive and tolerant. As a result, Sufi thought resonates with modern human rights discourse and its philosophical foundations embedded in the concept of inherent dignity by virtue of humanity.

However, extremist ethics invert this proposition. Ideological purity is far more important for extremists than universal human dignity. Only insiders have rights, and outsiders are either disbelievers or dissenters in their typical vocabulary. Rights are not universal entitlements but are rather granted as privileges. Consequently, the political order that such anthropology produces features coercion, surveillance, and violence against all others.

Pakistan's context exemplifies this compelling paradox of competing and contrasting anthropologies. Inclusive spirituality remains the defining characteristic of Sufi shrines in Pakistan's Sind and Punjab provinces. On these shrines, music, poetry, and rituals are lived experiences, not performances, and reinforce the values of humility, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, peace and shared humanity, so becoming homes for a lived anthropology of human dignity, where devotion, not doctrine or enforced ideological conformity, cultivates social belonging.

Militants, on the other hand, strategise the dismantling of such spaces to project their alternative religious authority and moral anthropology. It is perhaps one of the potent reasons why they attack shrines as they did in the 2017 Sehwan Sharif Suicide bombing. It was not a random attack but a well-thought-out and integral part of how militants scarify the public and feel no hesitation in taking innocent lives. Many critics associate this ideology of violence with a militant strategy to eliminate competing visions of Islam, targeting symbols of spiritual pluralism and sectarian harmony. Therefore, this study finds that militant movements like TTP show no mercy to inclusive religious culture and make every possible effort to replace it with a centralised violent ideology of doctrinal absolutism.

Moreover, this study finds that the struggle between Sufi ethics and militant extremism is civilisational, not merely political or security-related. This conflict is on the meaning of what it is to be a human person in Islamic thought. Sufi inclusiveness expands moral community; extremist exclusiveness shrinks it through ideological exclusion.

This ontological lens helps us better understand extremism and counterextremism. Contemporary CVE strategies that focus solely on surveillance, militarisation, ideological censorship, and the use of muscle power are no longer sustainable in a wired world because they fail to address metaphysical narratives that hold societies together in the crisis of fragmentation and collapse. The ethical and spiritual traditions within Islam, which affirm universal dignity, should therefore form an essential part of counter-extremism today more than ever before.

This study recommends that the Sufi Heritage needs to be harnessed to counterweight violent extremism in Muslim societies because the core issue in terrorism and extremism is religious and doctrinal appeal to justify and legitimise violence. These militant groups, who misinterpret the verses of the holy Quran, can be countered by those who have a correct and better understanding of the holy book and its methods of interpretation. Fundamental Islamic sources confirm that Islam is resonant with international standards of human dignity and rights, and the Sufi way of life and ethics can serve as strong and deep supplementary resources for this to counter violent extremism in Muslim Societies, particularly Pakistan.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we examined two competing visions of humanity in Islamic discourse, comparing and contrasting Sufi humanism with extremist absolutism and analysing their Islamic origins and proximity to them. We identified the limits of their difference and the variables that determine it. This paper posits that the real difference lies not only in political strategies and theological interpretations but also in their fundamentally different moral anthropologies. Sufi metaphysics, as articulated by Ibn Arabi and Rumi in the doctrine of Wahdat al-Wajud, embeds human dignity in the ontological unity of existence and the divine honour bestowed upon all the children of Adam through Tajali or manifestations of creation. Sufism holds human dignity to be intrinsic, not derivative, in contrast to extremist ideologies, which construct a conditional anthropology in which human dignity is contingent upon doctrinal conformity and communal allegiance. The extremist practice of Takfir or excommunication denies recognition to all Muslims and non-Muslims whom extremists consider either disbelievers or dissenters and are, therefore, liable to be killed. Excommunication legitimises violence against others or outsiders.

This study demonstrates that the conflict between two opposing visions reflects a deeper philosophical struggle and a contest over whether human dignity is conditional with sectarian ramifications or inherent, with universal implications. Intrinsic dignity invokes the protection of life, fundamental rights and freedoms that both Islamic teachings and contemporary human rights discourse permit and endorse. On the contrary, if dignity is subordinate to ideological belonging, reduction, and exclusion, violence stands rooted in the moral order with impunity.

Therefore, this paper concludes that Sufi humanism offers a compelling spiritual framework for countering extremist reductionism, absolutism, and violence by articulating and reclaiming the vision of Islam centred on mercy, unity, and the sanctity of human life and rights. This study concludes that the future of Islamic moral discourse depends on which vision of humanity prevails in Muslim societies. Therefore, not Islam, which has a perfect system for nurturing human dignity, but Muslims will have to choose and decide what they want to do with themselves and their faith.

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