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MURDER OF BELIEVERS: STUDY OF A PERSONALIZED CULT  
LEADER AT SARGODHA

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### ABSTRACT

History reveals that cults exist in many religions. Cult leaders have great influence on social life of the followers. They obey such people to get spiritual guidance and a right path to live. The present study is on a spiritual cult leader who committed a mass murder of 20 people under the shadows of religion. He did not work for humanity but for self. The purpose of this study was to find out the actual causes behind this massacre. For this purpose, qualitative type of research was selected to explore the case. 15 respondents were selected through purposive sampling technique. In depth interview was used as research tool which gave a deep exploration of the case. This study comprised of his life history, particular events, his behavior with followers during his development and life course and finally the reasons of his act. The study revealed that followers had great reverence with their spiritual leader and they thought that he could purify them and make them successful in life. The people were so much inspired by his spiritualism and charismatic personality that they readily sacrificed their lives. The main causes were ignorance, blind faith of the people, lust for power and failure of Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs).

### INTRODUCTION

Cult phenomenon is present in many religions of the world and the exploitation by the leaders of such cults is present in today's world. This is witnessed by the people whenever they find such exploitation, otherwise, it remains negligible in society. Beside such cult leaders there are many other religious leaders who

preach peace, harmony and tolerance in society and without their support the social progress, socialization and positive inclusion in society is almost impossible. But on the other side, the cult leaders are charismatic and can be found outside the main stream of beliefs. They used to have special knowledge and unique deceptive ways to attract people.

Such people, deliberately, conceals the realities from the followers, attract people from different social back grounds, make them of stern belief and then they use them according to their particular will. As Conger & Kanungo (1998) said that Personalized charismatic leaders exhibit the tendencies of narcissism to a degree that is destructive to followers and organizations. They can be self-absorbed, attention-seeking, and ignorant of the welfare of others. They often claim special knowledge and demand unquestioning obedience (Jennifer O'Connor, 1995). Their sense of personal entitlement can lead to self-serving abuses of power and autocratic leadership styles (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Their ultimate dreams of power and success can cause them to ignore the external environment and to avoid testing their judgement against external benchmarks. They attract people through their charismatic personality and alter their mind to have a full control. This distinguishes them from the main-stream religion and people start believing their commands and preaching without exploring the reality. They try to illude, wealthy and well-off people with poor religious background, youth from dissatisfied past and children from one parent families, and make them the part of their cult.

### ***Background of study:***

This study is about a personalized spiritual cult leader who murdered his followers at shrine. Study has been conducted to dig out the reasons for mass murder and why a spiritual leader did so. The murder of 20 people took place at a village in the vicinity of Sargodha city. They were murdered to make their souls purified and with notion that they will be resurrected after death. It was a unique incident of its nature in Pakistan and everybody took it as crime against humanity, at the end. Mr. A.H was born in a middle-class family in a village of district Nankana in Punjab. He joined local school for his studies where he was a good student but sometimes, he was not found comfortable with his fellows. After getting secondary education he went to Lahore for higher education and on completion of his studies he joined public department and got retired as an officer from Election Commission of Pakistan. During his professional career, he served for few years in FIA on deputation too. He had been posted in different cities of Pakistan.

Mr. A.H belonged to a religious family. His family had firm beliefs regarding religion and were known as nobles. He met with Mr. M.A in 2015 who lived in Islamabad and had a business of milk and yogurt in a local market of Islamabad. A.H (usually was called as Sarkar by his followers) used to spend his time with Mr. M.A who has almost the same ideas about the religion. Mr. M.A made a Darbar near village 95 N.B, District Sargodha in the green fields which had a charm of the environment and natural settings with birds chirping at the dawn and dusk. The loneliness of the Darbar enhanced the beauty and attracted the people for calmness and purification. Mr. A.H started visiting the village and

Darbar with Mr. M.A and soon became the favourite follower of Mr. M.A. The people started to get relief from the worries of their lives by visiting the place. When Mr. M.A died, his body was kept in the same Darbar according to his will. Mr. A.H became the leader of the many followers of who were under influence of Mr. M.A before his death. He started a different and unique kind of treatment of the worries of his followers. He used to purify their souls by making them naked and by hitting them at their bodies with sticks.

Some of the followers of Mr. M.A had a great reverence for his son Mr. A too who had been serving in Federal Police. They used to sit in his company and sometimes in different functions. A.H did not like that anybody would share his power therefore he had a grudge underneath and he decided to make his way clear. Mr. A.H had a belief that prayers are not necessary for the success in life after death but he could purify anybody by beating him. Many people followed his words and in two years he had many followers who would sacrifice their lives over the commands of their leader. The most of his followers were educated. His followers consisted of beautiful girls, handsome boys and illiterate people. He used to ask people that he could give life to the dead. He planned a massive attack on the opponents by luring the people. During a procession at Darbar he started killing people. He started to kill from Mr. A, the son of Mr. M.A. He called the people one by one and killed them and they readily went to his room in reverence. Three among the effected survived and the first one among the survived informed the people about the killings. But before the police came, he had killed 20 people by the help of his followers with sticks and knives. The victims were murdered nude and bodies were stabbed bluntly. Eventually, a case was registered against Mr. A.H and was arrested along with his four accomplices. The police recovered 20 naked dead bodies. The injured were immediately shifted to hospital for treatment. A case was registered against the criminals under section 354-A/353/186/324/302 PPC and 7-ATA. He has been awarded death penalty by the court.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Pargament& Mahoney (2002) said that spirituality can be understood as an outcome which can affect various psychological, social, and physical health outcomes. Spirituality is the acceptance of universal values that individuals believe guide their everyday actions and by which they judge their own actions and to state that spirituality is what separates man from animal (Fairholm ,1998). Fry (2005) presents workplace spirituality is inner life that nourishes and is nourished by calling of self within the context of a community. White also supports Fry's sentiments and said that the most clearly identified theme in our understanding of spirituality was connection with ourselves, with others, with the environment and with transcendent values such as love. (Ferguson & Milliman, 2008) describes spiritual leadership as "leadership based on spiritual principles". Holmes & Holmes (2001) pointed out that mass murder is described as a killing of multiple people in a rampage of violence in one time and place. Ronald E. Riggio, Ph.D., professor of leadership said that Charismatic leaders are "essentially very skilled communicators, individuals who are both verbally eloquent, but also able to communicate to followers on a deep, emotional level". (CongerRabindra & Kanungo, 1987) stated that Charismatic leaders are different from both consensual leaders and directive leaders in their use of

personal power. Charismatic leaders use impression management, or image building, to actively shape and reinforce their image of self-confidence, capability and power. Charismatic leaders use a wide range of methods to manage their image and, if they are not naturally charismatic, may practice assiduously at developing their skills (Conger, Kanungo, 1998).

Charismatic leaders engage the self-concepts of followers in the mission articulated by the leader. Values associated with charismatic leadership imply rejection of the status quo and reliance on non-conventional solutions to existing social problems. These values oppose the socially-endorsed dominant cultural values represented by conventional leadership (Fiol, Harris, and House, 1999). Charismatic leaders use the means of norms to build a strong emotional relationship with the people who work for them. Charisma is a form of a social authority, (Weber, Henderson, & Parsons, 1947). According to (Mancinelli, 2002) Charismatic leaders assume two important functions: of children and of mothers. (McCrimmon, 2007), states that a charismatic leader is someone who attracts followers with a dynamic and magnetic personality usually through inspiring speeches. Charismatic leaders are often perceived as being the only ones in possession of attributes that can effectively resolve problems, where this need for change provides an opportunity for the leader to inculcate an ideological vision when it will be best received by followers (Nahavandi, 2000). Cult members assume themselves as rejects from a hostile world, and the cult gives them a sense of belonging to a family and a feeling of purpose (Sorrel, 1978). The majority of mass murderers have a clear motive. The motives are mostly revenge and victims are chosen because of what they have done or what they represent (Lisa Aitken, 2008). Charismatic leadership becomes effective when an organization and its members believe that they have found in some individual a solution to the problems that confront them (C. Jones, 2001).

According to Jones (2001) charismatic leadership becomes effective when an organization and its members think that they have found someone a solution to their problems. Personalized charismatic leaders show less regard for legitimate channels of authority. They adopt such course of action that enhance their power within an organization and that credit to their achievements (Jacobsen & House, 2001). These types of leaders are characterized by personalized use of power, negative life themes and narcissism (Padilla, 2007). Socialized charismatic leaders represent a vision (HOWELL, 2005). Socialized charismatic leaders have vision that serves the interests of the organization. They strive actively to empower followers and to govern them through established channels of authority to get their goals. They show regard for and commitment to legitimate authority to implement objectives. The relationship between the leader and the members is focused on the message of leader and goals rather than on the personality of leader. Socialized charismatic is non-exploitive and more focused on follower needs (Choi, 2006).

## METHODOLOGY

### *Method of data collection*

Extensive interviews, observation and focus group discussion have been used to collect the information from the all concerned as these are the well approved methods of qualitative research. For this reason, I used purposeful sampling method in this critical study. The primary objective was to identify the core reasons of murder of 20 people by a spiritual personality who was supposed to make people purify and to lead them on a right path. Therefore, the thesis relies primarily on the information perceived during the interviews and observation. Literature review has been used for better understanding of the readers. Data from secondary resources including local police, newspapers and internet has been taken to probe into the case more deeply and for truth and justice for the 20 killings in mass murder. I used different modes and strategies to make my research reliable, testable, valid, reproducible, systematic and transparent. I took written notes, made audio recordings, call recordings and observation which, later on, was written separately, according to the circumstances. I used Observation, In-depth interviews, Documents collection/ analysis.

### *Field*

The shrine was surrounded by the green fields. The village in which this shrine was situated had mix population but the most of the people belonged to agriculture. The population comprised of landlords, workers, laborers and government servants which divided the population in three main classes i.e middle class, lower middle class and poor class. The literacy rate was less than 50%. The people of the area were scared and upset. Most of the people of the village and vicinity hesitated to share any information, mostly due to the gravity of the incident and police interference and interest during the investigation. People were reluctant to share the detail of events at the shrine.

### *Population*

Population was the followers of Mr. A.H who were selected through purposeful sampling, 10 followers and 5 common people of that area were selected, to avoid unnecessary delay and to maintain authenticity in research. Purposeful sampling was very helpful tool to dig out the core reasons of the incident as through this technique I was able to target the most helpful people of the village and other areas related to the massacre. Due to targeted population, it decreased the cost of research too. With the help of some friends, I was able to get access to the relatives of victims and of Mr. A.H. To make my research more reliable I travelled to Chak 20 JB which is his birth place in district Nankana Sahib from where I got basic information of his childhood and his family.

## DISCUSSION

The respondents revealed a deep reverence for their cult leader. He was a healer and people followed him blindly at one hand and he killed 20 among them at the other hand. The victims were both educated as well as illiterate. Therefore, one presumption that the maximum number of followers represent rich class

seems not authentic in this particular case. The reason behind may be the area of shrine. Young boys and girls were handsome and pretty respectively. They were from different villages and cities across the province. A.H had charismatic personality who attracted the people and in a minimum time period he had a reasonable number of followers. During research some respondents called A.H as “fake PEER” (fake religious leader) whereas others had reverence towards him. The followers were seemingly firm in their beliefs even after this incident. They were of the view that “SARKAR” had done right action and they had sacrificed their children for a noble cause and that it was the wish of our “SARKAR”.

As the shrine was in the fields therefore the crops provided a natural hide out for any kind of activity. The people were not contrary to the general public of province who do believe on custodian of shrine for their spiritual healing, worldly success, success and failure of marriage and even for having children. The believers of the cult leader were still looking for their healer and considered him as “innocent”. This particular thought to believe him as innocent was exponent of reverence of his followers. During this study, the respondents who revealed through interviews and discussion, that they all are from different areas but nobody showed much difference in their thoughts and believes. One thing was common that 40% respondents were reluctant to answer any question but a reasonable population told the facts about the event and the custodian. The movements and gestures of many people reflected their unwillingness to answer the questions and to discuss about the topic. Maximum number of followers of SARKAR, were not ready to declare him responsible for this act but their words did not favor their actions. Some showed indifferent attitude during the interviews. Some were suspicious and afraid of police and other agencies. Some of the respondents spoke on subject openly and considered the act as “barbaric”. Some locals helped to manage interviews of victims and their relatives.

General public had almost same response. Most of the people said and considered this act as unlawful and unjustified. People were of the view that he called the people and killed them one by one and they obeyed what the cult leader ordered. They added that “his followers can never deny his commands”. The people of different areas and regions had a reverence for him and were ready to sacrifice their lives. The strong belief was a common response from the people. They added, People thought that it was the belief system which made people, sometimes, blind and they obey the orders. A person like this charismatic man who would be a good orator and can impress people has an effect on the simple, illiterate, poor and socially wrenched people. This was the reason that he was respected much by different persons. They believed that their unfulfilled dreams can come true by interacting with such “charismatic leaders” who had some hidden powers and by beating he could purify the common masses.

So far as the matter of attaining control of Darbar is concerned, it cannot be ignored that the cult leader murdered 20 people for the gain of power. Having such personality and some lavish interests, it may be possible to remove the opponent aside for some benefits. He used to purify men and women by making them naked, hitting with sticks and to burn their clothes. He often gave it name

as “healing Process”. Some people were of the view that by doing so he used to satisfy his inner self. On investigation it was revealed that he was fond of drinking wine and attending dance parties.

In this particular case the media, as usual, gave a massive coverage but as it happens in most of the cases that as like other incidents it loses the importance and media forgot it as after few days of the incident, media stopped the coverage. So, from a burning story it changed into a normal category. The media portrayed him as callous and presented followers as unaware of religious values and beliefs. But the people said that now, media, onwards should educate people through different programs. The Police stood him responsible for killing 20 people and arrested him. He was charged but the many of his followers protested against his arrest and demanded for his acquittal. Nobody was ready to file complaint against him. The state became the complainant of the case. The narrative of the State was that the cause of the murder was apparent and that was to take control over the shrine. For this purpose, he managed to call the followers of A and killed them one by one. He was medically checked by the doctors and they announced him mentally fit. He was found psychologically fit by the psychologist. A.H along with his companions has been convicted by anti-terrorist court at Sargodha. The custodian of the shrine has been awarded death penalty and 5 million rupees fine.

### **CONCLUSION**

Whenever we think of a spiritual leader our mind jumps to the images of gurus, saints, yogis, mendicants, rishis, Jinas, Sufis, fakirs, monks and so on. But what is more important to the practice of spiritualism is moral purity and the attitude of inwardness rather than obsession with the outward rituals or physical appearance. A.H was a cult leader having good looking physique and impressive oratory skills but he became personalized charismatic rather than socialized one. He was supposed to guide his followers in the right way but he misled them for his own benefits. He was not morally pure. He killed 20 people to make himself a powerful figure with whom nobody can compete. Nothing such could happen if our formal and informal social control agencies would play their role. The main causes were identified as illiteracy, lack of proper religious preaching, lust for power and the strong belief system of the people. Such incidents can be stopped with proper registration of shrines, increasing the police patrol, sharing of information between departments, increasing of literacy rate and promoting local intelligence system. The proper system of religious education should be implemented in all provinces to educate the people regarding the core values of religion. In that area there were no public awareness and community program which should be started. Proactive approach is needed to stop such events in future. If law enforcement will be made just and sure, it will reduce such crimes.

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