

VOLUME 32, ISSUE 4, OCTOBER - DECEMBER, 2025

ISSN 0972-5563

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# Journal of Peace Studies

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*A QUARTERLY PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL*



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*A PEER- REVIEWED JOURNAL* BY INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES

ISSN 0972-5563

Journal of Peace Studies

VOLUME 32, ISSUE 4, OCTOBER - DECEMBER, 2025

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# Journal of Peace Studies

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From the Editors' Desk 1

## ARTICLES

The 'India Factor' in Bangladesh Politics:  
Implications for Bilateral Relations *Smruti S Pattanaik* 3

Indonesia's (Uneasy) Battle with Terrorism *Saman Ayesha Kidwai* 38

Politics of Disaster Management:  
A Critical Analysis *Niharika Tiwari* 54

Sectarianism in Indian Islam: Historical  
Trajectories, Global Currents and State  
Politics *Premanand Mishra* 73

From Autocracy to Uncertainty:  
Syria's Transition through  
a Neo-Realist Lens *Musssaib Rasool Mir  
Santosh Kumar &  
Srishti Sharma* 97

## OPINION

Delhi Terror Attack and the  
Misuse of Faith: Confronting  
Radicalisation and Restoring Moral Clarity *Imran Khurshid* 110

Between Resurgence and Revisionism:  
Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami's  
Post-Hasina Strategy *Ankita Sanyal* 118

## BOOK REVIEW

*India Turns East: International  
Engagement and US-China Rivalry*  
by Frédéric Grare *Faiza Riwan* 128

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International Centre for Peace Studies

**Printed at:**  
A.M. Offsetters  
Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi  
PIN- 110 003, TEL: 2463 2395

Office Address:  
157/9, Block 4, Second Floor,  
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# OPINION

## Delhi Terror Attack and the Misuse of Faith: Confronting Radicalisation and Restoring Moral Clarity

Imran Khurshid\*

*[The Delhi terror attack of November 2025 exposes the dangerous misuse of religion in legitimising extremist violence and highlights the psychological and ideological roots of radicalisation. Perpetrated by educated professionals, the attack underscores that terrorism is not driven by poverty or political grievance but by distorted religious narratives, identity crises, and external ideological influence. By falsely framing violence as martyrdom, extremists invert Islamic ethics, which categorically prohibit suicide and the killing of innocents. The article argues for urgent moral and intellectual leadership within Muslim societies to reclaim religious discourse, strengthen critical thinking, and confront radicalisation through ethical clarity, civic responsibility, and community engagement.]*



The Delhi terror attack highlights how extremist ideologies exploit vulnerable minds, turning education and religion into tools of violence. The recent suicide attack in Delhi, which occurred on 10 November 2025 near the Red Fort, killed thirteen innocent people and left many more wounded, revealing once again the tragic

consequences of radicalisation and the dangerous misuse of religion for violent ends.<sup>1</sup> According to investigators, the attack was carried out by Dr. Umar-un-Nabi (also known as Umar Mohammad), who drove a vehicle-borne IED into the area. Before the blast, he recorded a self-video on his phone—later recovered even though his brother allegedly tried to discard it—in

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The views expressed are authors own*

which he described suicide bombing as a “misunderstood concept” and framed the assault as a “martyrdom operation.” Investigators also found nearly a dozen recordings on his phone, along with evidence that he had conducted online sessions to radicalise others in the name of Islam.<sup>2</sup>

Nothing can be more un-Islamic than misinterpreting tenets of Islam (or for that matter any religion) to engage in meaningless violence. In reality, Islam categorically prohibits suicide and the killing of innocents. These actions stand in absolute contradiction to the Qur'an and the authentic Hadith, where human life is described as sacred and the taking of even one innocent life is equated with killing all humanity. Such violence is therefore not just morally reprehensible but religiously forbidden. Throughout the life of Islam's Prophet Muhammad, we find countless examples of patience, restraint, and compassion, even towards those who harmed him. He never retaliated against innocents, nor did he encourage hatred or indiscriminate violence. Those who justify their crimes through selective and distorted readings of Islamic scripture act against the very foundations of the faith.<sup>3</sup>

### ***The Misuse of Faith and Moral Responsibility***

The consequences of this manipulation extend far beyond the immediate victims. Each time terrorism is framed in Islamic terms, it inflicts profound harm on the global Muslim community. Such acts *reinforce suspicion, entrench stereotypes, and deepen discrimination*, severely distorting the image of Islam worldwide.<sup>4</sup> The Delhi attack has once again subjected ordinary Muslims to unwarranted scrutiny, despite the overwhelming majority categorically rejecting such violence.

While responsibility for the crime lies solely with the perpetrators, the social and psychological burden of such heinous acts is borne by millions who have no connection to the violence. Moreover, when attackers themselves frame their actions in religious terms, public suspicion becomes a predictable—though deeply regrettable—response. This is precisely why silence is dangerous, as it allows radical ideologues to exploit ambiguity and claim false moral and religious legitimacy. In such circumstances, it becomes imperative for Muslim scholars, clerics, and community leaders to speak with clarity and

conviction. They must unequivocally condemn these acts, issue strong religious rulings against suicide terrorism, and actively engage in public discourse to reaffirm that such violence has no sanction in Islam. When extremists distort religious language to legitimise murder, reclaiming the moral and theological narrative becomes not only necessary but urgent to prevent further harm.<sup>5</sup>

What makes the situation even more painful is how these acts have already damaged the cultural fabric and identity of regions like Kashmir, historically known as a land of Sufis, saints, and spiritual tolerance. Kashmir's spiritual tradition was shaped by great Sufi saints who preached nonviolence, compassion, humility, and peaceful coexistence—not only in their teachings but also in their daily conduct.<sup>6</sup> Many revered *Kashmiri Muslim saints were vegetarian*, embodying an ethic of non-harm so deep that it extended even to the smallest living beings.<sup>7</sup> When one reflects on Kashmir's spiritual past, it becomes clear how gentle, humane, and harmonious the society once was. *Even during the violence of Partition*, when large parts of the subcontinent were engulfed in brutality, Kashmir remained a rare example of communal harmony and coexistence.<sup>8</sup>

This legacy makes today's reality even more painful. The terror attack in Pahalgam on 22 April 2025, which killed 26 civilians, shattered a region once known for hospitality and spiritual gentleness.<sup>9</sup> The Delhi terror blast—carried out with the involvement of individuals of Kashmiri origin—has further damaged its image. Such incidents are steadily eroding Kashmir's reputation as a cradle of Sufism, moderation, and coexistence. It is therefore the responsibility of Kashmiri clerics, civil society, community leaders, and even politicians—many of whom perpetuate alienation through opportunistic rhetoric and victimhood politics—to condemn these acts unequivocally. Without clear moral leadership, Kashmir risks moving toward greater suspicion, fear, and reputational harm, with ordinary Kashmiris ultimately paying the price.

The very logic of suicide terrorism—and indeed all forms of terrorism—collapses under honest scrutiny. How can the deliberate murder of innocents be reconciled with any claim to divine reward? Human beings are not endowed with the authority to take life; that prerogative belongs to God alone, as per the scriptures. To assume the right to kill in God's name is therefore

both an act of profound arrogance and a grave moral sin. *Moreover, if God truly despised certain people, He would not have created them in the first place; creation itself is a testament to divine will and sanctity, not a license for human annihilation.* What makes the Delhi case particularly disturbing is that the perpetrators were neither impoverished nor socially marginalised. They were financially secure doctors, living comfortably in Delhi<sup>10</sup>. Their radicalisation cannot be attributed to grievances or socio-economic hardship. It was ideological and psychological, shaped by their vulnerabilities and exposure to extremist narratives—not by political developments in Jammu & Kashmir or anywhere else.

It is particularly harmful when political voices attempt to link such attacks to constitutional changes, alienation in Kashmir, or the abrogation of Article 370.<sup>11</sup> This argument not only misleads the public but also indirectly justifies terrorism by presenting it as a reaction. Radicalisation existed long before the 2019 revocation of Article 370, and it is neither a byproduct of that revocation nor of economic deprivation, which has nevertheless improved since. Blaming terrorism on political developments is to

misunderstand its true nature as radicalisation is primarily ideological, often influenced by external propaganda, separatist narratives, and extremist worldviews that promote a poisonous binary of “us versus them.”

The danger deepens when a neighbouring country’s military leadership openly embraces such ideology. Pakistan’s Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, publicly endorses the Two-Nation Theory, claiming that “Muslims are different from Hindus in all aspects of life.”<sup>12</sup> This is not a neutral remark but a narrative aimed at widening religious divides in India. Pakistan repeatedly comments on India’s internal issues—the Babri Masjid, the ideology of the RSS, and alleged injustices against Indian Muslims—are not out of concern, but to reinforce a worldview that frames India as fundamentally hostile to Muslims. When these themes are projected constantly, they turn the issue into something existential and ideological, entirely independent of any territorial considerations. This is how radicalisation spreads: vulnerable individuals begin viewing Indian society through a polarising “Hindus versus Muslims” lens crafted across the border. These

narratives distort India's reality and actively fuel the extremist mindset that seeks to justify violence.<sup>13</sup>

### ***The Psychology of Radicalisation***

Radicalisation is largely a psychological process, often beginning when individuals feel lost, purposeless, or dissatisfied. Even the well-educated and economically stable can become vulnerable if they lack critical thinking and are exposed to extremist interpretations of religion.<sup>14</sup> Professional degrees do not guarantee rational reasoning; many acquire technical knowledge without intellectual independence or civic awareness. Emotional emptiness or identity confusion later in life can make them susceptible to narratives promising purpose, glory, or reward. By contrast, those with strong critical thinking, humanities training, and exposure to civics and constitutional values are far less likely to be manipulated.<sup>15</sup>

Radicalisation is driven not by poverty but by psychological vulnerability. The Delhi attackers—Dr. Umar-un-Nabi, Dr. Muzammil Shakeel, Dr. Adeel Ahmad Rather, and Dr. Shaheen Saeed—were medically trained doctors, yet lacked critical reasoning and scientific temper. Their education provided

technical skills but did not foster intellectual independence.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, radicalisation rarely happens in isolation. There is almost always an external agent—online or offline—who plants, nurtures, or amplifies extremist ideas. This “radicaliser” may be a charismatic preacher, an online recruiter, a social-media influencer, a peer group, or even an encrypted-channel propagandist who never meets the individual physically.<sup>17</sup> Modern terrorism thrives on such invisible networks. Even self-radicalisation, which appears solitary on the surface, depends on the steady consumption of external content: sermons, videos, ideological tracts, or curated propaganda designed to manipulate emotions and distort religious teachings. In other words, psychological vulnerability creates the opening, but extremist ecosystems—whether digital or physical—provide the push. Radicalisation requires both an internal weakness and an external source of ideological contamination.<sup>18</sup>

Preventing radicalisation begins with recognising the early warning signs. Sudden social withdrawal, drastic behavioural changes, an abrupt turn toward hyper-religiosity without sound understanding, or increased consumption of extremist

material should raise concern. Families, friends, and institutions play a critical role in noticing these shifts. Everyday conversations—in social spaces, workplaces, or among peers—often provide insight into an individual's evolving mindset. Attentive engagement, combined with timely psychological support when necessary, can intervene before individuals are drawn into extremist pathways. At a broader level, communities, educational institutions, and religious organisations must collaborate to strengthen critical thinking, civic responsibility, and authentic religious understanding, thereby building resilience against extremist ideologies.

The Delhi terror attack highlights the urgent need for Muslim societies to take moral and intellectual leadership. Extremism does not serve Islam; it destroys it. It kills innocent people, deepens mistrust, isolates entire communities, and damages the global reputation of the faith. True Islam stands for peace, compassion, justice, and respect for human life. It is time for Muslims—in India and around the world—to reclaim this narrative with clarity, courage, and unity. Through consistent condemnation, public engagement, responsible scholarship, and psychological awareness, society can challenge radicalisation and protect both its citizens and the integrity of its religious traditions. ■

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