

Struggle for the survival of Values



[Publicly flogging of a girl by Taliban in Pakistan](#)

The footage recently made public showing the flogging of a girl in Swat and the execution of a man and woman in their 40s reportedly in the Hangu district must have sickened anyone with respect for human rights and dignity. As such, these videos constitute a graphic reminder of the fact that behind the rhetoric of religion, the real face of the Taliban is one of unmitigated brutality and murderousness.

This should come as no surprise. Since the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan during the 1990s and in Pakistan more recently, there has been ample evidence that the otherwise harmless moniker — which means ‘students’ — is a mask worn by an ideologically united group that uses tactics of violence, fear and gross coercion to get its way.

Given this, it is alarming that Pakistan’s state and society continue to bury their heads in the sand and resort to denial of either specific acts of brutality or the threat in general posed by the Taliban. The most recent example of this approach is an investigation team’s conclusion that the video depicting the whipping of the young woman in Swat was ‘fake and false’, as indicated by Interior Secretary Kamal Shah.

He quoted the final report as saying that that no such incident took place since the girl in question denied it and the area’s residents also expressed their ignorance. Yet anyone who has suffered such an act of barbarity, and who continues to live under the shadow of his or her persecutors, is unlikely to risk inducing their ire further. More dangerous, however, is the reduction of the issue to a debate over whether or not the video was ‘real’ and when exactly the incident took place.

This constitutes yet another example of the manner in which the Pakistani state and its citizenry live in denial of the clear and present danger to their personal freedoms. It is precisely this attitude that has allowed the Taliban and others of their ilk to make such deep inroads. Even if this particular video was faked, there is ample evidence otherwise of the Taliban’s brutality. Reports of beheadings, shootings and the coercion of people — who are citizens of Pakistan and residents of Swat — are made public practically everyday.

For the survival of values pertaining to freedom, democracy and citizens’ rights, the threat posed by the Taliban must be combated not only militarily but also by taking up positions on the ideological battleground from where they fire the salvos. For this to happen, the grotesqueness of the Taliban worldview must first be recognised and then rejected wholesale.

The Swati girl’s ordeal sparked outrage across the country; but such graphic footage ought not to be necessary to convince the citizenry of the Taliban’s real face. Living in denial is a luxury that is no longer available to us.