

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Asia > Pakistan > Human Rights & religious violence (Pakistan) > **Talibans silence musicians - Amjad Sabri: Pakistani Sufi singer shot dead in (...)**

# Talibans silence musicians - Amjad Sabri: Pakistani Sufi singer shot dead in Karachi

Thursday 23 June 2016, by [GRAHAM-HARRISON Emma](#) (Date first published: 23 June 2016).

## **Outpouring of grief across Pakistan as famed musician Amjad Sabri is killed in Taliban gun attack on car.**

One of Pakistan's most famous and respected musicians, celebrated for devotional songs from a centuries-old mystic tradition, has been shot dead by Taliban gunmen in Karachi.

Amjad Sabri, 45, was shot by two men on a motorbike as he drove through a congested area of the port city on Wednesday, Allah Dino Khawaja, the regional police chief, told Reuters. A relative travelling with the musician was injured but survived.

A spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, Qari Saifullah Mehsud, claimed responsibility for the killing and said Sabri was targeted because the group considered his music blasphemous, local media reported.

The attack happened a day after a homeopathic doctor from the Ahmadi minority was killed in the same city, and two days after masked men seized the son of a top provincial judge, fuelling concerns about violence and extremism in Pakistan's economic capital.

The songs Sabri performed are part of a Sufi tradition dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Known as Qawwalis, steeped in mysticism and sometimes based on mystic poetry, they are a key part of the spiritual life of millions of Muslims across south Asia and enjoyed by wider audiences of many faiths.

But both the music, and the shrines at which it is often performed, have long been a target for religious conservatives who shun all forms of music and consider the shrines unorthodox. Dozens of sites have been targeted in attacks, including a 2010 suicide bombing at one of Pakistan's most popular shrines.

The murder of a popular singer from a famous and well-loved musical dynasty was a clear warning to others trying to celebrate and preserve Pakistan's indigenous traditions, warned human rights activist Ali Dayan Hasan.

"These attacks have a chilling effect on the pluralism and diversity of religious practice and cultural expression in this part of the world. That is very worrying," he said. "Whenever something like this happens, you are a step closer to being a Wahhabi-Salafist wasteland."

Qawwalis have long been criticised by the Taliban and other hardline groups that reject all music as un-Islamic, and particularly object to those songs which focus on the life of the prophet Muhammad.

Sabri had been named in a blasphemy case brought by a conservative lawyer over a TV performance of one of his songs two years ago, a potentially serious allegation because the offence can carry the

death penalty in Pakistan.

Colleagues and fans denounced the Taliban for targeting a man who devoted his life and work to religion. "Our own dear Amjad Sabri ... was a true lover of God, life and all that's good," said Arieab Azhar, another popular Sufi musician.

"His mission of love has tragically been cut short by those who spread hate in the world, and is a great loss for all the divided people of our country," Azhar told AFP.

Karachi, home to 20 million people, is plagued by political, ethnic and sectarian violence. In 2013, a government sweep to clear out militants and criminal groups reduced the scale of the violence overall, but there is growing concern about targeted killings.

Last April, the activist and cultural leader Sabeen Mahmud was shot and killed. In May, Khurram Zaki, a rights activist and prominent critic of radical Islamists, was also gunned down in Karachi.

Sabri's murder prompted an outpouring of grief across Pakistan and around the world for a man hailed as one of the best performers of Qawwalis, from prime minister Nawaz Sharif to ex-cricketer turned opposition politician Imran Khan, and a host of cultural figures.

The musician came from a dynasty of legendary performers, and was known for reworking classics popularised by his father and uncle. He regularly appeared on national television, and had been performing daily for Ramadan.

**Emma Graham-Harrison**

---

**P.S.**

\* The Guardian. Thursday 23 June 2016 10.00 BST Last modified on Thursday 23 June 2016 15.57 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/22/pakistani-sufi-singer-shot-dead-in-karachi>