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EMERGENCE OF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

We often hear a phrase that Pakistan is the breeding ground of extremism. 'The Land of Pure' has been accused of harbouring extremists. Extremist ideology has been steadily mushrooming in Pakistan and presenting a pervasive challenge to the state. A nation having religion in its foundation has been juggling between its religious identity and 'secular framework' as was iterated by Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Clearly, the former has been successful in making its voice heard through the various means.

The continuous attack on religious and sectarian in minorities is increasing in Pakistan. The state has been unable to protect its citizens. The religious places are being targetted, the mosques; the Sufi shrines have been the main target of the sectarian extremists. But what Pakistan faces today has built up in many years. The sectarian rivalry amongst Muslims may be centuries old but out of all the Muslim states; it has taken an ugly face only in Pakistan, Iraq and Syria remain the exceptions.

It was not only the religious divide that gave rise to sectarian violence in Pakistan but also the socio-political factors that added fuel to the fire. The sectarian extremists were emboldened by the state patronage. The hatred for the other sect and non-acceptance of their creed propagated by the religious seminaries and religious leaders remain another important factor for the rise of sectarianism. It is widely believed that Islam has two major sectarian divisions-Shia and Sunni. But all this started as a political difference between two groups and over a period of few hundred years it formed into a religious and spiritual difference.

Pakistan being a second largest Muslim state in terms of Muslim population was looked upon by Persian Gulf countries to hegemonise Pakistan as per their sectarian preferences. It was not only the differences between Shias and Sunnis but sectarian extremisms had also spread amongst the other sects in Pakistan. The intra-sectarian violence amongst Sunnis also took a prominent face. The proposed paper will be an analytical study focussing on socio-political developments of sectarianism and how did sectarian differences occur in Pakistan. The paper will also look at the various factors that have encouraged the rise of sectarianism.

Keywords: Pakistan,sectarian difference,extremists,extremist violence

Introduction

In the last few decades, Pakistan has lost thousands of its citizens to violence. Pakistani soil is not only exporting conflict to other countries but its own land has been badly affected by it. Most of the Pakistan-based militant groups that are affecting it internally are sectarian in nature. These groups were supported by the State to fulfil their political motives. The political parties and the military both encouraged these sectarian groups in their own way. The political parties indulged in vote bank politics and joined hands with sectarian forces in various regions whenever required.

Pakistan has the second largest Muslim population preceded by Indonesia. Pakistan constitutes 97 percent Muslim population, out of which 77 percent constitute Sunnis and 20 percent Shias. Eversince its formation, Pakistan has lost its thousands of citizen to sectarian violence. The mayhem of sectarianism is more than two decades old. Much before the Shia-Sunni violence, sectarian difference was seen in Pakistan when the violence against *Ahmadiyyas* rose and they were declared non-Muslims in 1974. Increasing violence against minority groups has become one of the gravest problems in Pakistan. Religious differences is one of the factors of sectarian violence, others include social, economic and political factors.

Zia-ul-Haq's Islamisation drive played a significant role in escalating sectarian tensions in Pakistan. With the Islamisation process, the clergy became powerful, hence making Pakistan a chief patron and promoter of religious militancy.¹ Sectarianism has become more

¹ Amir Mir, *The True Face of Jihadis* (Lahore: Mashal Books, 2004), p. 19.

destructive and violent with greater access to modern methods of violence and attacks.²Rise in sectarianism can also be credited to external players. With the advent of the Afghan war and the Iranian revolution, the sectarian tensions further escalated within Pakistan. The Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran were sponsoring groups in Pakistan. This paper will be an analytical study that will explore the emergence of sectarianism in Pakistan. It will first look into the Islamic history to understand the beginning of sectarian differences within Muslims. It will try to study the factors responsible in escalating sectarianism in Pakistan.

Advent of Differences

The formation of Pakistan was laid on the basis of Islam. But after its formation, Pakistan became vulnerable to sectarianism, although, Islam is against the division into sects. The following verses mentioned in the Quran, clearly state the division of sects are against the spirit of Islam:

“And do not be like the ones who became divided and differed after the clear proofs had come to them. And those will have a great punishment.”³ [III: 105]

“Indeed, those who have divided their religion and become sects - you, [O Mohammad], are not [associated] with them in anything. Their affair is only [left] to Allah; then He will inform them about what they used to do.”⁴ [VI: 159]

“But the people divided their religion among them into sects - each faction, in what it has, rejoicing. So leave them in their confusion for a time.”⁵ [XXIII: 53-54]

All three verses taken from three different chapters' state that Islam is against the division of Muslim *Ummah*. In spite of it, Muslims around the world have been divided into many sects and sub-sects. As time passes, sectarian divide has deepened between the two major sects of Muslim, the Shias and Sunnis have been in tussle with each other over doctrinal issues. Shias and Sunnis may have many doctrinal issues but both the sects follow the same basic five pillars of Islam:

²Khaled Ahmed, *Religious Developments in Pakistan: 1999-2008* (Lahore: Vanguard Books Pvt. Ltd., 2010), p. 250.

³*The Qur'an*, Verse One Hundred Five, Surah: Ale-Imr'an, URL: <<http://quran.com/3>> (accessed on 29 June 2019).

⁴ Ibid, Verse Fifty Nine, Surah: Al-An'am, URL: <<http://quran.com/6>> (accessed on 29 June 2019).

⁵ Ibid, Verse Fifty Three and Fifty Four, Surah: Al-Mu'minun, URL: <<http://quran.com/23>> (accessed on 29 June 2019).

1. Oneness of God and Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H)⁶ was His last Messenger.
2. Establishing *Salah* (Prayers) five times a day.
3. Fasting for the whole of *Ramadaan*.
4. Paying *Zakat*.
5. Performing Hajj if one is capable of doing so.

The difference between Shias and Sunnis arose regarding the Companions of the Prophet and the first three Caliphs of Islam, Abu BakarSiddique, Umar bin Khattab and UsmanGhani, who were the only Caliphs who were rightly guided along with the fourth Caliph Ali bin AbiTalib. Shias are accused of disrespecting the first three Caliphs. The word Sunni is derived from the Arabic word *Sunnah*, which means followers of traditions of the Prophet. Shia in Arabic means ‘a group or a party.’ The roots of the Shia-Sunni divide were sowed after the death of the Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) on the question of who will the lead the Muslims after him as a Caliph. Sunnis position is that of taken by many Companions of Prophet, who believed that the new leader must be elected from those who are capable of taking the responsibility. While Shias believe that Ali, Prophet’s son-in-law and cousin was the rightful successor as he belong to the righteous family of Prophet.

According to the Sunni view, there was a strife building up between *Muhajireen*⁷ and *Ansars*⁸ as to who will lead the Muslims after the death of the Prophet. Abu Bakar and Umar went ahead to settle down the tension and pacify the situation while Ali was left behind to take care of the arrangements of last rites of the Prophet. Shias are of the view that Ali was intentionally left behind so that Abu Bakar can be chosen as the Caliph. While Sunnis believe that if Abu Bakar wanted to be the first Caliph then he would never have suggested the name of Umar and Abu Ubaidah, another companion of Prophet.

After mutual consultation it was decided that the Caliph will be elected from among the companions as the chaos was rising amongst the Muslims. Abu Bakar, the closest friend of Prophet was chosen as the first Caliph. However, Ali gave his consent to Abu Bakar’s election but he took some time for it. Ali’s contention was that being a close family member

⁶ P.B.U.H stands for Peace Be Upon Him. This phrase is iterated by the Muslims when they hear the name of the any of the Prophets of Islam.

⁷The people who migrated to Madinah from Makkah with Prophet in the early years of Islamic history. This journey is called as religious journey known as *Hijarat* in Arabic which also marks the start of the Islamic Calender.

⁸The people Madinah who welcomed Prophet and the people of Makkah accompanying him in the religious journey.

of the Prophet, he should have been consulted. Later, Ali was informed by Abu Bakar about the discord was arising between *Muhajireen* and *Ansars*, therefore, the Caliph had to be chosen immediately and any delay would have resulted in division of Muslim ranks. Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) did not leave any will regarding religious matter or regarding any property or regarding his successor, therefore, the election procedure was emphasised by the companions of Prophet.

With the election of Abu Bakar the question of the first Caliph faded out. Muslims were united under one umbrella of Islamic Caliph. Also the selection procedure of a Caliph was laid down. It was conducted through an open vote given by men of superior understanding and knowledge and also represented the general public. There was no rule of succession to transfer the seat of Caliph within a family i.e. to a son or a nephew of the Caliph.⁹ The first Caliph himself laid down these rules by not leaving a will or a recommendation for anyone to succeed him as the Caliph. After Abu Bakar, same election procedure was followed to choose the second Caliph Umar bin Khattab.

The Muslims were still united although some of the Muslims were voicing their opinion in favour of Ali. However, these people were in minority and no opposition was raised against Umar and the third Caliph Usman Ghani. The first major confrontation occurred after Usman was murdered by Abdullah bin Saba. He instigated the tribes living outside the cities against the Caliphate of Usman after gaining confidence of people as a devout Muslim.¹⁰ He posed as a supporter of Ali. It was his group that instigated some people of Kufa, Basra, Egypt and other Arabian tribes against Usman. Eventually these people sieged the mosque in Madinah and killed Usman. After him, the fourth Caliph was to be chosen. Initially Ali refused to be the Caliph but later he reluctantly agreed to it. Most companions gave him the pledge except Amir Muawiya,¹¹ the governor of Syria and the cousin of Usman.

There was widespread anarchy in the Muslim areas. The two most powerful tribes Banu Umayyah and Banu Hashim were involved in the long time power struggle in the battle of Safin. Ali belonged to Banu Hashim and Amir Muawiya belonged to Banu Umayyah tribes.

⁹Saeed Akbarabadi, *The Rise and Fall of Muslims: From the Pious Caliphs to Abbasid Spain and Moghal Dynasties* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 2010), p. 26.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 33.

¹¹He was the son of Abu Sufiyan who was the companion of the Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H). Abu Sufiyan was a businessman and also the ruler of Makkah in Pre-Islamic days.

There was a lot of bloodshed during this long battle and to put an end to it, arbitrators from both the sides devised a peace treaty. According to the treaty, Ali had control of Iraq and Iran and Muawiya had control of Yemen, Palestine, Egypt and Syria. Both, Makkah and Madinah were left out of their control. On the other hand, unhappy with this treaty, the group of Abdullah bin Saba turned against Ali and regrouped under new identity of *Khawarij*.¹²*Khawarij*'s later assassinated Ali and also made several attempts to assassinate Muawiya. It was only then, when the Muslims who supported Ali emerged as the Shias.

Hassan, the son of Ali assumed the Caliphate after his death. Muawiya was opposed to it and prepared to fight a battle. Hassan did not want bloodshed so called for a truce with Muawiya. He accepted the truce offers and he also agreed that after period of Muawiya's Caliphate, Hassan or Hussain, younger brother of Hassan will be the Caliph. With this the rule of rightly guided Caliph's came to an end including the six months' time period of Hassan as Caliph. After becoming the Caliph, Muawiya established Ummayyad Dynasty. After the death of Hassan, Muawiya revived the monarchical form of government and pledged his son Yazid as a Caliph in waiting. With this Muawiya broke the promise made to Hassan that after Muawiya either Hassan or Hussain will be the Caliph. Hussain who stood up in the protest was martyred in the Battle of Karbala along with 72 people of Banu Hashim tribe by Yazid. This battle was decisive in further alienating the supporters of Ali. There was persecution of Banu Hashim and Ahlul-Bait by the monarchy of Ummayyad Dynasty. The martyrdom of Hussain became a crystallising force around which Shia faith took shape.

Shias believe in 12 Imams who were divinely guided to show the true path of Islam to the believers with Ali being the first imam, Hassan second and Hussein being third and last being Imam Mahdi who believed to have gone into occultation in 10th century. They believe that he will reappear few years before the Day of Judgement and will establish just rule in the world. The believers in 12 Imams are the called the Twelver Shias and are constitute the majority of Shias. On the other hand, Sunnis don't believe these 12 imams as divine leaders of the Muslims. However, many Sunnis believe in coming of Imam Mahdi. But they believe that he will have direct link from the family of Hassan and will not come as the twelfth imam. They believe that the sacrifice given by Hassan by abdicating the position of Caliph in favour of saving Muslim blood will be awarded with the rule of Imam Mahdi before the Day of Judgement.

¹²They are neither the Shias nor the Sunnis. Their beliefs and practices are different from that of the Sunnis and Shias.

Rise of Sectarianism in Pakistan

The basis of Pakistan was ideological and religion was supposed to be the binding force of the newly born country. Soon, this belief was threatened when the sects within the Muslim community started to assert themselves to create their hegemony over Pakistan. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan welcomed not only various Muslim communities to Pakistan but also the non-Muslims. In his speech at the Constituent Assembly on 11th August 1947, he asserted,

“You are free to go to your temples; you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the State... Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual but in a political sense as citizens of the State.”¹³

Within a decade of its formation, Pakistan fell into the pit of sectarian differences. This led to violence and killings of hundreds. Article 20 of Constitution of Pakistan guarantees “freedom to profess religion and manage religious instructions” and Article 25 guarantees “equality of all citizens.” In spite of this constitutional protection given to all citizens of the Pakistani State, religious and sectarian minorities have suffered severe discrimination under both military regimes and civilian governments.

Sectarian divide in Pakistan is often viewed as a Shia-Sunni divide but the divide has other facets to it. In 1953, the *Ahmadiyya* community's faith was questioned who were targeted for their belief as it was in contradiction with the principle of Islam; the finality of Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H). Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) proclaimed to be the promised *Messiah* and *Mahdi* awaited by Muslims. Sectarianism was officially seeded in Pakistan when the government declared *Ahmadiyyas* as non-Muslims. Former Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz was accused of being an *Ahmadiyya* and he later had clarified that he is a Sunni Muslim by mentioning about his family's religious rituals.¹⁴

Violence against Ahmadiyyas

After the creation of Pakistan, *Ahmadiyyas* held high positions in Government, Army and Bureaucracy. Pakistan's first Foreign Minister, Zafarullah Khan was an *Ahmadi* and many believed that he was not only propagating their faith but was also establishing them into the

¹³ Quoted from Mohammad Ali Jinnah, “The President's Address,” at Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947, cited in Z. H. Zaidi (ed.), *Jinnah Papers: Pakistan at Last, 26 July-14 August 1947*, Series 1, vol. 4 (Islamabad: Qaid-i-Azam Papers Project, 1999), pp. 535-38.

¹⁴ Cited in “The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan,” *Asia Report, International Crisis Group*, 18 April 2005, p. 6.

political and administrative structure of Pakistan.¹⁵The movement against the *Ahmadiyyas* was initiated by *Majlis-i-Ahrar-Islam* (The Organisation of the Free Muslims), later joined by other religious parties. The *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* (JUI) and *Jamat-e-Islam* also supported the anti-*Ahmadiyya* agitation. *Ahrars* demanded that *Ahmadiyyas* should be declared non-Muslims and therefore a minority.

The Muslim League also joined the protest against the *Ahmadiyyas* and built an anti-*Ahmadiyya* movement in Punjab. Soon the protests escalated into riots and turmoil in Lahore in 1953. The situation escalated quickly and Martial Law was imposed in Lahore City. A Court of Inquiry known as Munir Committee was set up to inquire into the Punjab disturbance which stated that the campaign against *Ahmadiyyas* had assumed a clear pattern from 1948 onwards.¹⁶ Steadily this campaign gained momentum and led to increased violence against *Ahmadiyyas*. In article 260 of 1973, the Constitution of Pakistan defined who is a 'Muslim' and who qualified to be a Muslim and based on that *Ahmadiyyas* were declared as non-Muslims. The *Ahmadiyyas* are not allowed to have public places of worship, and thus confined to their homes for worship. These are the only minority group who are not allowed to promote their faith as guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan. *Ahmadiyyas* were also banned from obtaining a Pakistani passport. To obtain a passport one has to take a pledge of not being an *Ahmadiyya*. They are also prohibited to marry a Muslim under the Pakistani Law, and if they are willing to marry a Muslim then they are required to produce a conversion certificate. They are also prohibited to observe Islamic festivals and Hajj.

This declaration laid the strong foundation of sectarianism in Pakistan. The sectarian violence of the last three decades is more prevalent between the Shias and Sunnis primarily because of historical conflict attributed to the religious differences. Also, the social differences that prevailed between Shias and Sunnis in Punjab further aggravated the situation. In the context of this study, it is important to understand what were the societal formations in Pakistan and how did it give rise to sectarianism.

Class Conflict in Jhang

The State has always protected the interests of the dominant class but at the same time it manipulates the class interest for its own political gains. In peripheral capitalist countries

¹⁵ Khalid Bin Sayeed, "Islam and National Integration in Pakistan" in Donald Eugene Smith (ed.), *South Asian Politics and Religion* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 403.

¹⁶ Cited in M. Munir, *Report of the Court of Inquiry Constituted under Punjab Act II of 1954 to Enquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953* (Lahore: The Superintendent, Government Printing, 1954), p. 13.

which have neo-colonial influences, the State controls and regulates economically dominant classes which are particularly the indigenous bourgeoisie in the case of Pakistan.¹⁷ After the creation of Pakistan until General Ayub's coup, Pakistani politics was dominated by the feudal class as they inherited the power structure. Later the indigenous bourgeoisie which flourished under the Ayub regime were provided with all the support and aid to foster industrial development. Despite its development, the indigenous bourgeoisie wasn't able to establish the political representation in Pakistan as it was dominated by the landed aristocracies.

The class struggle in Jhang district gave a prominent face to sectarianism and to the Shia-Sunni divide. The majority of rural population in Jhang are the Sunnis and poor migrants from East Punjab of British India who worked as labourers to the Shia landlords. Shia landlords held power in Jhang much before the creation of Pakistan. Mariam AbouZahab describes sectarian militancy, "as a reaction to the growing sense of insecurity and hopelessness resulting from the uneven distribution of resources, and as a revolt of the uprooted and marginalised periphery deprived of access to the political arena."¹⁸ In the 1970s and 1980s, the urban centres of Punjab grew in size as a lot of labour remittances came in from the Gulf countries. These flourishing Sunnis demanded political representation which in turn challenged the Shia elites. The Sunnis started to assert their sectarian identity to counter the Shia influence especially over the Jhang district. Religion became a political tool to strengthen the sectarian hatred. Struggling Sunnis saw sectarianism favouring them and the political class used it to mobilise people and attain political gains.

An anthropological study conducted in Jhang district found out, "the sectarian conflict in Jhang is mainly the result of the struggle for political power between the traditional feudal families who are primarily Shia and rural-based and the emergent middle-class which is largely *Deobandi* or *Ahl-e-Hadith* and urban-based." One of the respondents who took part in the study opined; "*Yeh to Maulana Sahib ke game thee, Aur wohiss main kamyabhogia.*"¹⁹

Role of Islamisation

¹⁷HamzaAlavi, "Class and State" in Hassan Gardezi and Jamil Rashid (eds.), *Pakistan: The Roots of Dictatorship* (London: Zed Press, 1983), p. 42.

¹⁸ Mariam AbouZahab, "Sectarianism as Substitute Identity: Sunnis and Shias in Central and South Punjab" in SoofiaMumtaz, Jean-Luc Racine, and Imran Anwar Ali (eds.), *Pakistan: The Contours of State and Society* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 79-80.

¹⁹Sarfaraz Khan and Hafeez-ur-RehmanChaudhry, "Determinants of Sectarianism in Pakistan: A Case Study of District Jhang," *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2011, p. 241, URL: [http://www.idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr8\(1\)11/40.pdf](http://www.idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr8(1)11/40.pdf) (accessed on 25 June 2019).

Islamisation changed the face of Pakistan. One of the aspects of Islamisation was the rise of sectarianism. When the Islamisation was initiated, it was evident that the *Hanafi* interpretation of Islam, which was followed by Zia-ul-Haq, would be implemented. After ousting Zulfikar Bhutto, he imposed the martial law and not only promised to finish corruption and implement the *Sharia* law in Pakistan but also to conduct elections within 90 days of time. The election never took place in the promised period; therefore, to legitimise his coup, he used Islam.

Zia introduced various Islamic laws like Blasphemy Law, introduced Sharia Courts, Hudood Ordinance, ordinances for *Zakat* and *Usher* and many more under his Islamisation drive. Although he was criticised on several fronts especially by women activists' but he was sharply targeted by the Shias of Pakistan for the *Zakat* and *Usher* ordinances in particular. Zia made the deduction of *Zakat* compulsory through the banks and distribute it through a central *Zakat* administration. Shias who were in minority had problem with the State deducting *Zakat*, as they believe that although *Zakat* is obligatory for financially stable Muslims and the State has no role to play in it, it is strictly between man and God. Hassan Abbas notes "The Shias feared that the majority would end up ramming their version of Islam down the throats of all minority sects and force them to comply with law that, according to their interpretation of Islam, they saw as being violative of Islamic injunctions."²⁰

Shia group *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqah Jafferia* (TNFJ) under the leadership of Jaffer Hussain protested against the government²¹ and Shias from across Pakistan gathered in Islamabad in July 1980 and openly confronted the Zia regime's ban on public gatherings. This two days protest virtually halted the government.²² Zia had to bow down to the demands of TNFJ and the government signed the 'Islamabad Agreement' which freed Shias from paying the compulsory *Zakat* to the government and also granted them the permission for separate Islamiyat course for Shia students. Shias were successful in asserting themselves and meeting their demands which gave them a boost. Ayatollah Khomeini played an important role in assuring that the Shia demands are met. During the protest, Shias loudly read out a

²⁰ Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), p. 113.

²¹ Muhammed Amir Rana, *A to Z of Jehadi Organisations in Pakistan* (Lahore: Mashal Books, 2005), p. 402.

²² Syed Vali Reza Nasr, "Islam, the State and the Rise of Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan" in Christophe Jafferlot (ed.), *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2002), p. 88.

message from Ayatollah Khomeini to keep the spirits high.²³ It is argued by many in Pakistan that later the military has used the sectarian flux to pressurise democratic governments.

The majority of Muslims in Pakistan are Sunnis and minority are Shias and within Sunnis majority are *Barelvis* followed by *Deobandis* and *Ahl-e-Hadith*. Hassan Abbas states “Zia not only started Islamisation drive to Islamise society but he also unknowingly set up a wave to convert *Barelvis* into *Deobandis*.”²⁴ This led to a catastrophic outcome. Islamisation didn't only create a divide between the Sunnis and Shias but also divided the majority Sunnis into antagonistic factions.

Role of Madrasa

The *Madrassas* were divided on sectarian lines and one of the motives of these *Madrassas* was to outnumber and dominate rival sects.²⁵ *Madrassas* also produced a large amount of religious literature in the form of books, journals, magazines, pamphlets all propagating sectarian hatred and violence.²⁶ The literature promoted sectarian hatred and constantly aimed at proving the rival sect as infidel. As a result students were trained to counter argue other sects' ideology, theological matters and jurisprudence. Therefore, the mindset of students was built in a way that they rejected other sects and extremism was sown in their minds.²⁷ *Deobandi Madrassas* issue *fatwas* against Shias and recruits are trained to call Shias non-Muslims. Around 15 percent of *Madrassas* have linkages with sectarian militants or international militants, according to the government's estimates.²⁸

Sectarian hatred didn't even spare religious places like mosques which were an open place for all the Muslims to pray. The name given to the mosques clearly indicated their sectarian affiliations.²⁹ Wikileaks published a cable in 2008 about the *Madrasa* network in Punjab which reveals, “Government and non-governmental sources claimed that financial support estimated at nearly US \$ 100 million annually was making its way to *Deobandi* and *Ahl-e-Hadith* clerics in the region from ‘missionary’ and ‘Islamic charitable’ organisations in

²³Rana, *A to Z of Jehadi Organisations in Pakistan*, p. 405.

²⁴ Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror*, p. 103.

²⁵Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 79.

²⁶ Cited in Nasr, “Islam, the State and the Rise of Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan,” p. 91.

²⁷Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam*, p. 79.

²⁸Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam*, p. 79.

²⁹Zahab, “Sectarianism as Substitute Identity: Sunnis and Shias in Central and South Punjab,” p. 84.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates ostensibly with the direct support of those governments.”³⁰ The cable further tells that the recruiters of the *Madrassas* look out for poor families especially those having multiple children facing severe financial problems. “An immediate cash payment is finally made to the parents to compensate the family for its ‘sacrifice’ to Islam. Local sources claim that the current average rate is approximately US \$ 6500 per son.”³¹

Jessica Stern provides an excerpt from her interview with Ahmed Rashid, a prominent Pakistani journalist where he mentions,

“a *Lashkar* militant told me that he earns 15,000 rupees a month more than seven times what the average Pakistani makes, according to the World Bank. Top leaders of militant groups earn much more; one leader took me to see his mansion, which was staffed by servants and filled with expensive furniture. Operatives receive smaller salaries but win bonuses for successful missions. Such earnings are particularly attractive in a country with a 40 percent official poverty rate, according to Pakistani government statistics.”³²

Impact of Saudi Arabia-Iran Rivalry

Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and views itself as a torch-bearer of Islam after the *Wahhabbi* movement of the 18th century. The Sunnis having *Wahhabi* influence are antagonistic towards Iran and Shias. Similarly, Shias are equally inimical to Saudi Arabia and *Wahabbism*. The *Barelvis*, too, are at loggerheads with *Wahhabis* and reject the Saudi government’s religious practices. Pakistan has been the playground for both Iran and Saudi Arabia to take an upper hand in rivalry through sectarian violence. Pakistan, with the second largest Muslim population, also has the second largest Shia population after Iran. Therefore, the effect of the Arab-Persian rivalry is bound to impact Pakistan. According to Mumtaz Ahmad, “Shiaism in Pakistan became more centralised, more clericalist, more Iranianised, and more integrated with the international Shia community... Sunnis became more Arabicised as a result of the mass migration of Pakistani labour to the Gulf States and the

³⁰ “2008: Extremist recruitment on the rise in south Punjab madrassahs,” *Dawn.com*, 22 May 2011, URL: <<http://dawn.com/2011/05/22/2008-extremist-recruitment-on-the-rise-in-south-punjab-madrassahs/>> (accessed on 15 July 2019).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Jessica Stern, “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 79, no. 6, November-December 2000, pp. 120-21.

generous funding of Saudi Arabia to the Pakistani Sunni *Madrassas* and to the jihadi organisations.”³³

The Islamisation process by Zia was initiated as a process with Islamic universalism. But, this universalism did not appease the Shias in Pakistan. The Islamisation process which Zia carried out did not fall into the purview of Shia interpretation of Islam. The Islamisation process was based on Sunni interpretation and more specifically on *Hanafi/Deobandi* interpretation of Islam. *Deobandis* were in strong opposition to Shias, therefore, Shias saw the Islamisation process as mere ‘Sunnification’ process as they did not approve of Sunni interpretation of Islam to be imposed on them. This gave enough reasons to Iran to support the Shias in Pakistan and Shia groups engaged in asserting their rights effectively. In 1986, then Interior Minister of Pakistan publicly accused *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqah Jafferia* (TNFJ) of receiving funds from Iran to escalate sectarian tensions and to harm Pakistan’s relations with Arab countries.³⁴ Shia dominated areas like Kurram agency, Hangu and Peshawar districts received money from Iran.³⁵ The Sunnis in Pakistan received funding from Saudi Arabia, various NGOs and charity organisations in addition to meagre *Zakat* provided by the government.

Pakistan’s inclination towards Saudi Arabia was obvious as a large numbers of labour forces from Pakistan were stationed in the Gulf countries which provided foreign remittances to Pakistan. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states were aware of the healthy relations between Iran and Pakistan established during the Shah’s regime which didn’t go down well with GCC States. Khaled Ahmed writes, “there were rumours in Pakistan in 1982 that the GCC States have threatened to expel all Pakistani workers if Pakistan refused to lend ‘military teeth’ to the GCC.”³⁶ Interestingly, before the 9/11 attacks, 80 per cent of remittances came from these Gulf countries.³⁷ Maintaining fruitful relations with Pakistan was important for Saudi Arabia, first to contain Iran and secondly, Pakistan is the only

³³Mumtaz Ahmad, “Shi’i Political Activism in Pakistan,” *Studies in Contemporary Islam*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, Spring and Fall 2003, p. 64.

³⁴Mumtaz Ahmad, “Revivalism, Islamisation, Sectarianism, and Violence in Pakistan” in Craig Baxter and Charles Kennedy (eds.), *Pakistan: 1997* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), p. 114.

³⁵Satish Kumar, “Militant Islam: The Nemesis of Pakistan,” *Aakrosh*, vol. 3, no. 6, January 2000, pp. 1083-84.

³⁶Khaled Ahmed, *Sectarian War: Pakistan’s Sunni-Shia Violence and its Links to the Middle East* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 44.

³⁷*Ibid*, p. XII.

Muslim country with Nuclear Weapons and it was unofficially reported that Pakistan was helping Saudi Arabia in developing its own nuclear programme.³⁸

ValiNasr mentions an excerpt from Agha Shahi, Former Foreign Minister of Pakistan, revealing an interesting fact, “Khomeini once sent a message to the Pakistani military ruler General Zia, telling him that if he mistreated the Shias, he [Khomeini] would do to him what he had done to the Shah.”³⁹ Many alleged that the TNFJ wanted to enforce Shia interpretation of Islam on Sunnis too, just the way Zia was imposing the Sunni interpretation of Islam on Shias. Shia students started studying Persian, got scholarship to further study in Iran and on their return saw Pakistan as a “mirror of Iran.”⁴⁰ This Shia representation and strong assertion made it difficult for Sunnis to bring them under the umbrella of Islamic order. Shias loyalty for Pakistan was doubted and they were seen as a danger to Islamisation. Not all the Shias in Pakistan support Iran, many educated Shias in Pakistan believe that Iran has been using Pakistani Shias to fulfil its political motives and Iran was of no help to Pakistani Shias.⁴¹

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, both predominantly Sunni States share a common concern about Iran, a Shia State. However, both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan seek to keep normal ties with Iran. The concern is the Shia minority unrest which could be triggered by Iran. Therefore, Saudi Arabia looked upto Pakistan when it comes to nuclear weapons because a nuclear Iran may cause worry to both its neighbours. The Iranian revolution provided the platform to the Shias worldwide to look upto the Shia leadership in Iran to challenge the Sunni hegemony in the Gulf and also in Pakistan. The Iranian revolution set up a stage for Shias to struggle and assert themselves in the Sunni dominated Pakistan. Secondly, it set up the stage for the players like Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran to extend the ground of Persian-Gulf rivalry in South Asia and use violence against each other in Pakistan. Both of these countries

³⁸ “Pak-Saudi “special” relationship,” *Daily Times*, 17 April 2006, URL: <[http://www.Khaled Ahmed, *Sectarian War: Pakistan’s Sunni-Shia Violence and its Links to the Middle East* \(Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011\), .dailytimes.com. pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C04%5C17%5Cstory_17-4-2006_pg3_1](http://www.Khaled Ahmed, <i>Sectarian War: Pakistan’s Sunni-Shia Violence and its Links to the Middle East</i> (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), .dailytimes.com. pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C04%5C17%5Cstory_17-4-2006_pg3_1)> (accessed on 29 June 2019).

³⁹ Cited in Syed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), p. 138.

⁴⁰ Mariam AbouZahab, “The Regional Dimensions of Sectarianism in Pakistan,” in Christophe Jafferlot (ed.), *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2002), p. 116.

⁴¹ Cited in Hassan Abbas, “Shi’ism and Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: Identity Politics, Iranian Influence and Tit-for-Tat Violence” *Combating Terrorism Center*, September 2010, p. 29, URL: <<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/CTC-OP-Abbas-21-September.pdf>> (accessed on 10 July 2019). p. 45.

struggling to dominate each other were instrumental in mobilising and radicalising sectarian identities.

Sectarian Killings and its Impact on the Society

Sectarian violence has resulted in numerous killings in Pakistan. In its initial decade, between 1987-1997, more than 1000 serious incidents were recorded and 478 people were killed and around 2300 were injured.⁴² Initial sectarian killings involved the killings of the leaders of the rival sects. In 1987, Ehsan Elahi Zaheer, a Saudi backed Sunni cleric was killed in a bomb blast in Lahore. The following year, a prominent Shia leader Arif Hussaini was murdered in Peshawar.⁴³ In 1990, Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, the founder of *Deobandi* sectarian group *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP) was murdered and Shia militants were accused of it. As a result of it, sectarian clashes broke in Punjab province. At a later stage, Iranians became the prime target of Sunni groups; Iranian cultural centre was set on fire in 1997 and a few days later seven people were killed including an Iranian diplomat.⁴⁴ In another attack five Iranian air force personnel were killed in Rawalpindi.⁴⁵

The year 1998 witnessed one of the deadliest sectarian attacks known as the Mominpura massacre. 25 Shia mourners were killed at Mominpura cemetery in Lahore in 1998 which incited sectarian violence and out of 150 dead, 78 were killed only in Punjab and around 80 were left injured.⁴⁶ Roots of sectarianism have deeply penetrated in Pakistan as there has been the increase in intra-sectarian divide during the last decade. In the year 2000, Yusuf Ludhianvi, a *Deobandi* cleric was murdered and exactly after a year *Sunni Tehrik* Chief Saleem Qadri was murdered. In 2006 the *Milad-un-Nabi* congregation was attacked at Nishat Park and the top leadership of ST was killed in the attack.⁴⁷ The recent attacks on the Sufi shrines have worsened the situation.

Punjab has borne the event of the sectarian violence but increasing sectarian differences have reached to Northern Areas of Pakistan. Gilgit is mainly a Shia dominated

⁴² Mariam AbouZahab, "Sectarianism as Substitute Identity: Sunnis and Shias in Central and South Punjab" in Soofia Mumtaz, Jean-Luc Racine, and Imran Anwar Ali (eds.), *Pakistan: The Contours of State and Society* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 78.

⁴³ Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam*, p. 93.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Zahab, "The Regional Dimensions of Sectarianism in Pakistan," p. 119.

⁴⁶ Nasr, "Islam, the State and the Rise of Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan," p. 86.

⁴⁷ Ashok K. Behuria, "Sects Within Sect: The Case of Deobandi-Barelvi Encounter in Pakistan," *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 32, no. 1 January 2008, p. 75.

area while immigrants there are Pashtun and Punjabi *Wahhabis*. These immigrants were adamant to spread their jurisprudence and pressurised local authorities to use the school textbooks that are published in North West Frontier Province.⁴⁸ This conflict took an ugly turn and sectarian and ethnic violence surfaced in the area. A Sunni cleric was assassinated in May 2004, and as a reaction a Shia mosque (*Majlis-i-Ali Raza*) was blown up in Karachi killing 23 people.⁴⁹ Karachi is also the most vulnerable place in terms of target killings. The escalating violence in Karachi has led to psychological problems. A study cites a Karachi Psychiatrist as saying that "... about 60% of people are under stress from violence related tensions and constant fear of becoming a victim."⁵⁰

Sectarian groups have followed a pattern of attacks. Initially, the killings were confined to leaders and activists of the rival groups, which took the shape of tit-for-tat killings by rival sectarian groups. Later, the religious gatherings were attacked; mosques of rival sects were attacked, subsequently targeted killings engulfed doctors, lawyers and traders. Religious gatherings have been attacked especially during the month of *Muharram* and on *Milad-un-Nabi*.

Muslims around the world are united in their belief on the five pillars of Islam, inspite of having other doctrinal differences. However, not all Muslim-majority countries have the problem of sectarianism, the way it is in Pakistan. The Central Asian countries do not identify with any sect and therefore the sectarian difference is not evident.⁵¹ But the scenario in Pakistan and some West Asian countries is not the same as sectarian identities there are very strong. According to the report produced by the *Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life*,

"in Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Russia – countries with self-identified Shia populations ranging from six percent to 37 percent – clear majorities of Sunnis (both men and women, young and old) agree that Shias belong to the Islamic faith. On the other hand, in Pakistan, where six percent of the survey respondents identify as Shia, Sunni attitudes are more mixed: 50 percent say Shias are Muslims, while 41 percent say they are not."⁵²

⁴⁸Mehtab Ali Shah, "Sectarianism: A Threat to Human Security, A Case Study of Pakistan," *The Round Table*, vol. 94, no. 382, October 2005, p. 621.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 622-23.

⁵⁰ Cited in Ibid, p. 623.

⁵¹"The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity," *Pew Research Forum*, 9 August 2012, URL: <<http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/ReligiousAffiliation/Muslim/the-worlds-muslims-full-report.pdf>> (accessed on 18 July 2019).

⁵² Ibid.

The Shias in Pakistan are facing a similar situation as faced by the *Ahmadiyya* earlier. A large percentage of Sunni Muslims do not recognise Shias as a part of their society. The Sunnis have also been victim of sectarian attacks but such attacks are normally confined to individual attack. In the case of Shias, the community is targeted at the larger level. Shia groups are identified and then attacked. Number of Sunnis killed in sectarian attacks has been much less compared to the number of Shias killed. Both the communities have been suffering because of the violence. One community is suffering at a larger level and another at the smaller level. When a bomb blast takes place it is random, it is specifically intended against one community but cannot discriminate between them. But quite often the attackers make sure that people they are killing belong to the rival sect.

With the killings increasing in Pakistan in late 1980s and early 1990s, differences emerged within the sectarian groups and various fronts were created later, *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ) formed in 1996 is one such example. It is the most lethal sectarian organisation till date. It is the only organisation which has a female wing. Its formation gave new dynamics to sectarian violence in Pakistan. Both SSP and LeJ were based on *Deobandilines*. Steadily, other Sunni sub-sects like *Barelvi* and *Ahl-e-Hadith* entered the ongoing sectarian tussle in Pakistan. *Ahl-e-Hadith* groups were mainly operating in Kashmir as the place has the strong *Barelvi* influence. Even the *Barelvi* organisations were working actively against India and also to undermine the influence of *Ahl-e-Hadith* groups in Kashmir. Their so called “jihad” against India turned into a sectarian tussle between them.

Shia groups were more powerful than the *Barelvi* groups and *Ahl-e-Hadith* in the beginning but steadily the Shia groups lost their strength. Interestingly, the first Shia group TNJF founded by Jaffer Hussain was formed in 1974, nine years before the formation of SSP. TNJF had been actively involved in sectarian violence but later transformed itself into a political party by renaming itself as *Tehrik-e-Jafferia Pakistan*. The clear motive of all the sectarian groups are to prepare the political grounds for themselves, even SSP was transformed into a political party. Initially all the sectarian groups took the path of violence to assert their rights and to establish themselves in their respective sects so that at a later stage some political mileage could be gained from it.

Similar to the Sunni LeJ, Shia *Sipah-i-Mohammad* (SM) was also the lethal face of Shia sectarian violence. The group had a stronghold in Thokar Niaz Beg and ran its own state within Pakistan. The incompetency of the Pakistani government was reflected in the area where even the police did not dare to enter. This group also attacked the media for not giving

them enough coverage. Clearly, this group wanted to spread the message to the world that Shias may be a minority sect in Pakistan and rest of the world but their strength cannot be undermined. As this group lost its power it did not hesitate to join hands with Sunnis to find a common enemy in Israel. And the groups like LeJ have also found a new enemy in America.

Conclusion

Sectarian politics and rivalry have done no good to the Pakistani society. It has suffered a lot in the last three decades. The governments, whether military or democratic, both turned a blind eye to sectarian violence. It was only in 1997, that a step was taken to curb the menace. The Anti-Terrorism Act has been amended twice but its enactment is still a big question. Pervez Musharraf may have taken steps by banning various extremist organisations but simultaneously, he worked to bring in the religio-political organisations into mainstream politics. In 2002, *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA) was formed to gain the support from the majority of sects. To an extent, Musharraf was successful in his motive. Although, in the 2002 elections, other democratic parties won more seats than the MMA but General Musharraf recognised it as the second largest party in the 2002 elections. MMA was seen as a force which would ease the sectarian tensions in Pakistan but it did not turn out as expected.

The extremist groups have become a serious threat to the Pakistani society. In the near future it is difficult to say that will there be any solution to this menace? The support base of religio-political organisations has shrunk but the instances of sectarian violence are increasing rapidly with time. Sectarian killings started as tit-for-tat violence and the leadership was attacked at large but steadily the Pakistani society is engulfed in it. The religious processions, Sufi shrines, mosques are widely attacked in Pakistan. Currently, the Shia *Hazaras* are under attack. Baluchistan has become the most vulnerable place in Pakistan followed by Pakistan's financial capital Karachi.

The domestic situation in Pakistan provided a strong base for sectarian violence. But the external factors played an important role as internal factors. Two important external actors, Saudi Arabia and Iran fought in Pakistan to establish their hegemony. It was only after the Iranian revolution that the Shias of Pakistan were bolstered and asserted themselves against Zia's Islamisation. Iranian revolution gave the new identity to the Shias and because of this empowerment and with support from Iran they could demonstrate against the Islamisation drive of the military regime. Their demands were successfully met because of the moral support Pakistani Shias got from the neighbouring country. This created fear within

the military regime and during the Afghan war and in the post-revolution Iran, Zia joined hands with Saudi Arabia. This diplomacy provided huge funds to the Sunni *Madrassas* in Pakistan, to both the *Ahl-e-Hadith* and *Deobandi Madrassas* which work actively against the Shias. The domestic situation in Pakistan provided a strong base for sectarian violence. But the external factors played as important role as internal factors.

To compete with the world, the intellectual class needs to grow at a faster pace but the sectarian and other extremist groups fail to understand it. Their definition of an Islamic State is completely different from that of the educated Muslim society. The killings are professed in the name of Islam which is against the spirit of Islam. Innocent killing is prohibited in Islam. Clearly, these extremist groups use Islam as a tool to develop hegemony and a fear psychosis amongst the Muslims which ultimately would help to fulfill their political motive to stay in power.

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