

## **Evolution of Sectarianism in Pakistan: A Threat to the State and Society**

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### **Abstract**

Contemporary Pakistan has been passing through the worst phase of its history due to internal law and order and security issues. Terrorism and sectarianism had never struck the state with such intensity in the past as it has been since the last two decades. Suicide attacks on the worshippers in the Mosques and Imambargahs as well as target killing of religious leaders of either sect, at various places in the country has posed a serious threat to the peace loving nation of Pakistan. The feelings of vulnerability have continuously been increasing day by day. This situation has put the entire social structure of the country at stake. Why are the Muslims killing the Muslims? Who are the masterminds? And what is the remedy to this menace? All such questions are yet to be answered. This paper will try to unveil the elements involved in this bloody game of viciousness. The work will also throw light on the effects of sectarian ferocity on the state and society of Pakistan.

**Key Words:** Extremism, Militancy, Pakistan, Religion, Sectarianism, Terrorism, Violence.

### **Introduction**

If various religious factions in a society antagonize each other with such stringency that each of them reflects its beliefs as a complete religion and does not prepare to reconcile with the diverse view, would be a state of sectarianism. "The term Sect is used in the sociology of religion to designate a particular kind of religious group"(International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 1968: 130). Usually a sect is a body of people who hold certain opinions divergent from those of others who are accounted to be of the same religion. Normally this word is used for a "separately organized religious group having its typical name and its own places of worship" (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1961: 361).

Pakistan has been under a serious threat of sectarian fierceness since the time of its inception. The main contenders are the Sunnis and the Shias. The nature of hostility is not only inter-sects but also intra sects. The most unfortunate facet of this encounter is that all the sects involved in violence do have the claim of serving the religion. Killing of intellectuals, religious scholars, and innocent worshippers in the Mosques and Imambargahs is service to religion in their judgments. A religion of peace and tolerance has been transformed into a religion of extremism and radicalism. These fanatics not only consider their adversaries as infidels but also are convinced not to give them the right to alive. The vested interests of political bosses and foreign aid have further intensified the situation. Each sect justifies

itself on the true path and is sure to go to the paradise. They construe the religion according to their own concern and consider the others as non-believers even inferior to that. "Sectarian differences have re-emerged now with atrocious intensity due to unchecked and uncontrolled religious intolerance promoted by the semi-literate, little educated religious leaders supported by selfish political leaders with vested interests" (Naek, 2001: 29).

The sectarian situation became worsen when Haq Nawaz Jhangvi created Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan(SSP) in 1985 and demanded to pronounce Shias as non-Muslims and Pakistan as a Sunni State. He took part in politics and later on was murdered by his opponents. But his followers alleged Shia community, responsible for his assassination. Later on Lashkar-e-Jhangvi(LeJ) came on the scene with Riaz Basra as its chief, and exterminated many Shias including intellectuals, scholars and worshipers. "To respond such killing Shias from Thokar Niaz Beg, Lahore made Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan(SMP) and embattled Deobandis'(Rana, 2004: 415). Although both the organizations are banned in Pakistan since many years but bloodshed and target killing of people of either sect are persist without any restraint.

Generally terrorists do come from sectarian and Jihadi groups, but their masterminds are somewhere else. Some exterior elements are normally alleged in this regard along with Pakistan's secret agencies. LeJ extremists may have their links in Afghanistan while SMP in Iran. Due to the activities of such organizations thousands have been killed in the name of religion. "The victims and the distressed groups customarily blame America of aiding the offenders to blow out what they look as their agenda of global supremacy. Beside America, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iran and India are also held responsible for providing financial aid to the organizations involved in sectarian violence" ([www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)).

Several belligerent organizations in Pakistan were banned and their accounts frozen over the past few years. The main organizations banned are SSP, LeJ, SMP Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Tahrik-i-Taliban Pakistan(TTP). In a speech in June 2001, to leading religious scholars, former military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf lashed out against the religious extremists "It(the world) looks upon us as terrorists. We have been killing each other and now we want to spread violence and terror abroad"(Spotlight on Regional Affairs,2005: 21).

Islam is a religion of peace. It stands for moderation and wellbeing of all. Violence and insecurity initiate from human greed, disgust, jealousy and conceit. Some people misuse religion as a source of worldly power. Freedom to practice one's religion is a fundamental human right. The more constructive approach to manage religious fanaticism is, for the mainstream groups and ruling elites, to practice Tolerance, Equality and Justice and have a respect for minority's faith, their values and cultures. To undermine the sinful intentions of the extremists and anti-state elements, promotion of education, employment opportunities and values, like tolerance and moderation are prerequisites. Allah says in the Holy Quran, (4:93)

*“And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein; and the Wrath and the Curse of Allah are upon him and a great punishment is prepared for him”*

## Background

In Muslim history different sects appeared due to the interpretations, which were made to comprehend the spirit of the commandments of Allah and His messenger Muhammad (PBUH). The companions of the Prophet (PBUH) varied from each other in wisdom and aptitudes. They have the conviction in obeying the sayings of the Prophet without any amendment. They stayed silent if could not catch any statement of the Prophet about certain issues.

‘It is correct that over some issues a certain group or individual was in the right or very close to the truth but in various matters every interpretation was derived from the basic teachings of Islam’ (Tirmazi, n.d: 28). With the passage of time these variances, because of human limitations, turned into prejudice and factionalism. The foundation of most of the sects was rested on sincerity but under the dominance of human desires a state of conflict and enmity had developed.

Although there was unanimity of views on most of the religious codes yet the contentious matters were largely more focused and the excited followers unnoticed certain instructions of Islam in order to execute their personal will upon others. Therefore, they started defying religion and ideology and became argumentative to each other. This stubborn attitude of the followers had developed a bad tradition among Muslims. Hereafter a religion of peace and harmony has encompassed certain components of intemperance.

Most of Muslim sects in the early days of Islam primarily emerged as political schools of thought. Later on, in course of their endeavor to find out scriptural and theological bases of their respective political opinions they gradually converted into theological sects. The first serious political disagreement that brook out in the Ummah was about the office of the caliph but after the Battles of Jamal and Safeen the political differences turned into religious disputes. Many sects appeared on the scene. Kharijites are considered as the first sect in Muslim history. Up to the battle of Safeen they were the supporter of Hazrat Ali (R.A) but they seceded from the Alids on the plea that “no one has the right to become arbitrator or decision maker in the matters of Din” (Ghazi, 1992: 166). When Kharijites started killing the innocent people in the name of religion, Hazrat Ali (R.A) crushed their power by defeating them at the battle of *Nahrwan*. Another important sect was Shias. ‘The people who supported Hazrat Ali (R.A) throughout his life and after his martyrdom remained loyal to his descendants were given the name Shian-e-Ali or Shia’ (Urdu Encyclopedia of Islam, 1975: 297). However after the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain (R.A) in Karbala the Muslim community bifurcated permanently into Shias and Sunnis and the gulf could not be bridged since then.

“The South Asian societies in contemporary environment are confronted with religion based violence, sectarianism, extremism, communalism and even regionalism” (Javaid, 2011: 10). South Asian societies have always been religious in outlook. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity are the main religions of this region. Most of them have been confronting against each other in different course of history. The disagreements were not only inter-religion but also intra-religion. Even the similar schools of thought sometimes indulged in violence amongst themselves. The past of South Asia is full of religious, ethnic and cultural clashes.

Religion has been used as an instrument during most of the movements. The seekers of supremacy have constantly misused the religious emotions of the people for the fortification of their vested interests. The destiny of South Asia regarding religious activism could not be changed with the changing world. Instead the state of affairs are extraordinary serious as the places of worship are not even free from this menace. Such state of intolerance and immoderation has brought a bad name to Muslims in particular. Although extremism is prevalent among all the religions of this region yet the Islam only is commonly more focused and projected in the negative light.

The history of sectarianism and ethnicity in South Asia may be outlined and examined during three different eras. The Muslim rule, the British raj and the post-colonial scenario. During Muslim reign there were not only conflicts among ruling elites on political bases but also ‘prevail a religious scuffle among different sects of Muslim society. During the Sultanate rule in India (1206-1526) they practised the Hanfi code of law’ (Iqbal, 2003: 66). The Mughals were of Sunni persuasion except Humayun. During his rule the influence of Shiaism spread significantly in the Southern India. The Muslims themselves, only for worldly advantages, exploited the Shia-Sunni variances in such a way that the thirteen hundred years old disputes were made anew.

At that time a number of Muslim scholars made efforts to stabilize the ties between two confronting ideologies of Muslims. Among these scholars the services of Shah Wali Ullah and his family on the part of Sunnis and Syed Dildar Ali and his family on the part of Shias are praiseworthy. ‘They not only categorically rejected the notion of different sects in Islam but also suggested that only the enemies of the Muslim faith benefit from sectarian conflicts, which also try to fuel the rifts in Islam’ (Singh, 2002: 207). Another scholar of that time was Allama Tafazzul Hussain Kashmiri (Died 1801). He was Shia scholar and never indulged in the provocative issues. ‘It was included in his daily routine to deliver lecture of Imamia school of thought before the Zuhar prayer and of Hanafi school of thought after the Zuhar prayer’ (Ikram, 1970: 640).

With the collapse of Muslim authority in India and the rise of British, many new religious groups appeared which, with the passage of time, advanced on sectarian ground. Besides *Wahabi* movement, *Ahl-e-Hadith*, *Beverlalwis*, *Deobandis* and Shias were the main schools of thought during colonial rule. The

policy of 'Divide and Rule' was also playing its role behind this sectarian division. "The sectarian divisions were exacerbated with the advent of western colonialism and the European colonialists, were perfectly aware that while they could not overcome Islam. Sectarian division could easily destroy the faith" (Singh, 2002: 207).

Although rawness may be observed to some extent in the inter-sectarian relationship within the Muslim community of India yet they have presented unanimity and harmony in the struggle for freedom of Pakistan. Particularly the Shia community contributed more devotedly. Among the pioneers of freedom, many prominent leaders were from Shia sect. Syed Ameer Ali, Sir Agha Khan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and many others, consciously created an atmosphere free from sectarian prejudice. These leaders never tried to uphold their specific ideologies but represented the whole Muslim community of the subcontinent. At one occasion when the institution of *Khilafat* was abolished by the Turks, then Syed Ameer Ali and Agha Khan wrote a letter on behalf of Sunnis to the Turkish authorities regarding the restoration of institution of *Khilafat*. 'But they were rebuked by the Turkish leader Ismat Pasha with the argument that no Shia can represent the Sunnis, (Ikram, 1970: 171).

Except few religious leaders whole of the Muslim community reinforced the idea of creation of Pakistan. After the partition of subcontinent, the religious parties restructured themselves in both the newly born states. In post partition India the state of inter-sectarian harmony among Muslims became much better as compared to Pakistan. "As for the Shia Sunni feud, it is now by and large a story of the past. Today, the Muslims form one single community and the fact that they belong to one school or to another is no longer a barrier to friendly relations and marriages" (Kettani, 1990: 117).

However in Pakistan the situation of sectarianism has remained terrible and fearsome since the time of its establishment "because religious sentiments of unsuspecting, illiterate and simple masses are being exploited by politically motivated religious leaders." (Spotlight on Regional Affairs, 2005: 2). In Pakistan, both Sunnis and Shias have ordered themselves as political parties, the former as the *Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam* (JUI) and SSP and the latter as *Tehrik Nafaz Fiqah Jafria* (TNFJ) and SMP. 'The political influence of each is much more limited than their sectarian following' (Alvi, 1988: 86). Furthermore the Shia-Sunni aversion and disapprobation has revolved into armed conflicts that claimed thousands of precious lives. A country created in the name of Islam- the religion of peace- is seems to be unworthy of its watchwords "*Pakistan Ka Mutlab kia La Ilaha illAllah*".

### Sectarian Face of Religio-Political Groups

Pakistan is the first state in world history ever created in the name of religious ideology. The chief objective of its creation was to offer conducive environment to the Muslims of this area, to live a life in accordance with the principles of Islam

and they could promote and practice Islamic codes and values freely and independently. Islam has imparted religious freedom, equality, justice and rule of law for all regardless of colour, caste and creed. It does not entertain sectarian tendency and dividing the Muslim community into Sunnis, Shias, Deobandis, Baralawis, Wahabis or any other sect. Father of the nation Quaid-I-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was well aware of the fact that Pakistan is a multi-ethnic and multi sectarian society. So, at many occasions he warned the people of Pakistan about the vices of such considerations. In a public meeting at Dacca in March 1948 he expressed “if you want to build up yourself into a Nation, for God’s sake give up this provincialism. Provincialism has been one of the curses; and so is sectionalism-Shia, Sunni etc” (Jinnah, 1989: 181).

Like all other advices of Jinnah, the nation mistreated this one as well and since independence these ethnic and sectarian variances went on mounting with the passage of time. The most deplorable feature is that all is being done in the name of faith. Most of the religio-political organizations have remained active towards the elevation of religious aggressiveness. Almost all the sects have been involved in reciprocal riots. Bad practice of pronouncing the adversaries, as infidel is very common. And the doctrine of the activists is seems to be no infidel has the right to stay alive. All the religio-political organizations including *Jamat-i-Islami* (JI), JUI, JUP, *Jamiyat-e-Ahl-e-Hadees*, TNFJ and *Pakistan Awami Tehreek* want to enforce Islamic system in Pakistan but the Islamic system of each of them is quite different than that of others. Also the Islamic System of any of them is entirely undesirable for all others. As most of the religio-political parties have specific benefits in their respective systems therefore, for the achievement of those objectives, each of them have led to the birth of their militant off-shoots which in the long run have taken over the parent body. SSP and LeJ traces its links with JUI while SMP with TNFJ. The activists of all such militant factions have always served the vested interests of their respective mother organizations. In some cases regimes and leaders are also blackmailed by these non-state actors as they have specified certain constituencies for themselves. Appearance and augmentation of SSP in the politics of Jhang is a perfect sign of such description.

The graph of religious intolerance has been constantly moving in the upward direction since the so called Islamization of Zia-ul-Haq appended with Afghan Jihad provided an ultimate atmosphere for the mushroom growth of such militant organizations. The wave of Shia-Sunni violence, undoubtedly the most horrible in the history of its kind, that has left several religious scholars and leaders dead on both sides, has shaken the whole society. Due to this sectarian xenophobia, Muslims are killing the Muslims mercilessly. Pakistan is being projected among the nations of world as an intolerant and violent society. But the innocence rather ignorance of the blind followers is being exploited by the Mullahs, Pirs and Imams, for their seditious activities, in the name of religion. “The situation is being continually fueled and exacerbated by highly inflammatory speeches from the pulpits by the activists of the militant Sunni organization Sipah-i-Sahaba and,

the equally militant Shia organization, Sipah-i-Muhammad” (Ahmad, 1998: 101). Innocent people are embattled in Mosques and Imam Bargahs. Posters and handbills produced by the imprudent leaders from both sides are daily enflaming their supporters to “rise, take up arms, and seek paradise by eliminating the enemies of Islam” (Ibid).

Regrettably most of the rulers in Pakistan have come into power by grabbing authority with little public support, have suffered from lack of legitimacy and authenticity. Thus they had to support and boost such religio-political organizations to withstand their illegitimate government and prolong themselves in command. “All dictators and even Mr. Bhutto appeased them to win and retain their support and favour” (The Nation, 16 September, 1994).

General Zia ul Haq imposed Martial Law in Pakistan in 1977 after a protest campaigning launched by the religio-political parties by the name of *Tehreek-e-Nizam-e-Mustafa* against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto the then Prime Minister of Pakistan. Zia, to accommodate the religious sentiments of the masses introduced a process of so called Islamization. “His Islamization policies encouraged and promoted all types of movements but the conservative *Deobandis*, *Ahle Hadith* and *Jamat-i-Islami* were the main beneficiaries” (www.crisisgroup.org). Coincidentally the internal environment of the state was changed due to Martial Law and the peripheral due to the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and Islamic Revolution in Iran. These developments put their influence on Pakistan as well. Consequently, the more conventional and militant version of Sunni Islam had grown in strength and public influence.

The Shia community organized themselves and formed TNFJ in 1979. TNFJ started criticizing Zia’s certain policies like Zakat and Ushar ordinance. To counter this Shia activity, Zia adopted a policy of promoting Deobandi sect. In this respect many appointments were made in the Auqaf Department and the graduates of *Wafaq-al-Madaris* were preferred in recruitment. ‘In this way Hundreds of mosques fell into Deobandi hands. Distribution of Zakat funds was equally lopsided in favour of Deobandi and Ahle Hadith madrasas’ (Ibid). In this environment a city of central Punjab ‘*Jhang*’ has become the center of sectarian politics. Here in 1985 SSP was founded by Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, who was an active member of JUI. The slogan espoused by this organization “*Kafir Kafir Shia Kafir*” was highly provocative and it was raised in all the meetings and demonstrations of the organization with complete fervor. In the meanwhile Deobandi organizations started a country wide campaign against Shia community through publications associated with JUI and SSP. “Deobandi journals especially *Al-Haq* (Akora Khatak), *Al-Balagh* (Karachi) and *Tarjuman-i-Islam* (Lahore) were publishing highly inflammatory writings against the Shias and were, in fact demanding a separate quota of electoral seats and administrative positions for them as they had earlier demanded in the case of the Ahmadis” (Ahmad, 1998: 108).

The expression of these pamphlets clearly illustrated the political motives of SSP and it came on the forefront of the politics by taking part in general elections

in 1988 against Syeda Abida Hussain, a renowned and dominant politician of Shia sect. In these elections she stood victorious on two seats of National Assembly by defeating Haq Nawaz Jhangvi and Maulana Rahmat Ullah. Nevertheless Haq Nawaz Jhangvi had posed a threat to the political elites of district Jhang.

Beholding the fame and potential of SSP, the Sunni businessmen community started sponsorship this organization, obviously with finance. Sheikh Muhammad Yousaf, one of the richest men of Pakistan, and Haji Abid Hussain another industrialist used the forum of SSP to reach the benches of Punjab Assembly. There was also conflict of interest between the Sunni businessmen and Shia feudals, as majority of the big landholders of Jhang belonged to Shia community and were very influential in the politics. That is why the Sunni businessmen invested in SSP.

The chief of SSP was an expressive and fiery orator hence the pivotal theme of his speeches was the Shias and feudalism. "Maulana Jhangvi's incendiary speeches and Shia scholar's attitude further inflamed the sectarian fires among the young people who began terrorist activities against each other" (Rana, 2004: 195). On February 22, 1990 chief of SSP, Haq Nawaz Jhangvi was assassinated, just on the door of his house. That incident has proved to be highly explosive for the peace and law and order of Jhang. The leadership of SSP accused the local Shia landlords, particularly Abida Hussain, against whom Haq Nawaz Jhangvi contested in the National Assembly elections, and the Iranian government for this murder. The jinni of religious fanaticism and sectarianism has come out of the bottle and everything went out of control. Since then the nervous breaking tension, blood-curd sectarianism spellbound the whole area "However in Jhangvi's assassination SSP found a martyr whom they could use in the political arena of Jhang. The National Assembly seat lost by Haq Nawaz Jhangvi in 1988 was won by SSP in 1990" (Ibid: 196).

The followers of both sects were pitted against each other and approaches of disgust reached at its apex. Furthermore personal hostilities, clash of drug trafficking and other such illegal business interests, involvement of the interests of selfish politicians had further extended the complexity of the issue. "Criminal elements, drug mafia and the collusive politicians had made well use of the things and employed all their stratagems and mean political tricks to politicize the situation by further fanning sectarian differences to serve only of their vested interests" (Sadiq, 2002: 243). Consequently more than three hundred people died in sectarian violence in Jhang District alone during the period between 1986 and 1998.

With the increasing violent incidents against Shia community on the part of SSP, few emotional activists of TNFJ decided to launch a militant wing that could counter SSP. The group had the backing of Imamia Students Organization (ISO). As soon as the announcement of the formation of SMP, was made. A lot of young men from ISO joined the new organization. "When Sipah Sahaba threatened Asif Zardari with murder he had Sipah Mohammad created to counter the threat and

provided financial support and arms” (Rana, op.cit; 414). The headquarter of SMP was setup at Thokar Niaz Beg Lahore. The organization held its first public meeting at Mochi Gate, Lahore. About two thousand people were present and most of them were armed. The speeches delivered at the occasion were highly provocative and SMP leaders uttered, we are exhausted of picking up bodies. Now, we will remove the name of SSP. After that SMP launched many attacks on SSP leadership and workers. In these attacks dozens of people were killed including Zia-ur-Rahman Farooqui, the chief of SSP. Latter on SMP was debarred on August 14, 2001 along with its counterpart LeJ, an offshoot of SSP.

### **Potential of Banned Organizations**

Imposition of ban could not restrict LeJ to kill the adversaries and its terrorist activities exceeded government’s power. This was the second Government of Nawaz Sharif. LeJ going beyond bounds, attempted on Prime Minister’s life by exploding a bomb on Raiwind Road in Lahore. Then the government decided to crush the power of LeJ. Dozens of its activists were killed during encounters with police. However its chief Riaz Basra escaped to Afghanistan, where Taliban administration was ever ready to give shelter to anti-Shia terrorists. After couple of years the government of that time succeeded to get rid of Riaz Basra on May 14, 2002 when he was killed in a police encounter at Mailsi in District Vihari. After Basra’s death, his successor Muhammad Ajmal Alias Akram Lahori was also taken into custody in July 2002 from Karachi. After this apprehension, LeJ changed its strategy and joined hands with other jihadi groups, active in Pakistan. Its new chief Asif Ramzi claimed “that all the major jihadi organizations, including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, are gathering on a platform- the Muslim United Army. In the near future, guerrilla activities will be launched against anti-Islam police officers and other non-Muslims” (Herald, December 2002: 45). There have been reports of close association of LeJ with al-Qaeda. This was a challenge for Musharraf’s military government thus sectarian terrorist groups, particularly LeJ, were vigorously targeted and has had substantial impact domestically. A noteworthy number of LeJ leaders were either arrested or killed during several encounters. In the course of action SMP, the main Shia organization responsible for sectarian violence, remained dormant.

Regardless of these various blows, however, the group looks to have retained a significant ability to assault. In July 2003 LeJ claimed responsibility for the suicide attack on a Shia mosque in Quetta, which resulted in the deaths of over 50 worshippers. This “massacre in Quetta suggest that the underground networks and support structures of sectarian groups particularly that of the Laskar-e-Jhangvi, remain unimpaired, and may, indeed, have achieved greater complexity and resilience through their linkages with other terrorist organizations.” ([http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/EG09Df09.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/EG09Df09.html))

In response to Musharraf’s policy, attempts were made on his life. Eid Muhammad of LeJ, was alleged to have rigged Chaklala Bridge, Rawalpindi, with

## South Asian Studies 29 (2)

explosives in an attempt to kill President Pervez Musharraf on December 14, 2003. The more stern policy was adopted by the government towards LeJ, the more it targeted Shia community. In March 2004, LeJ bombed a Shia mosque in Quetta, this time massacred 47 worshippers. The military ruled with a police search in Karachi and an intensified aggression in the tribal area of South Waziristan. Then the terrorists ensued towards Punjab after giving jerks to Karachi and Quetta. In the month of October, 2004 more than 70 people from both sides were killed in the space of 10 days at Sialkot, Multan and Lahore. The victims in Multan were Deobandis who had assembled there to observe the death anniversary of SSP's chief and MNA, Azam Tariq. In the Multan bombing more than 40 Deobandis were slain. While the victims in Sialkot and Lahore were Shias. "Whether the victims are Sunnis as in Multan, or Shias as in Sialkot, Lahore and most other cases, one is no better or worse than the other. Muslims are killing Muslims, that is the point" (The News, 13 October, 2004).

In spite of government's forceful exertions the nasty series of sectarian homicide is yet uninterrupted up to the year 2013. "It is only after about 2005 that Pakistan's capacity to control militant organizations became a real question" ([www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org](http://www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org)). Many prominent figures from both sides had been killed by the competitor groups at scattered places across the country. The slaughtered included Haroon ul Qasmi of SSP, IG Sakhilullah Tareen, a Sunni hardliner in the Northern Areas, Allama Riaz Hussain Najafi, head of Jamia Al Muntazir, a major Shia seminary in Lahore, Mufti Rehman and Maulana Irshad, leaders of the Banori Mosque Karachi, Allama Hassan Turabi and Allama Nasir Abbas renowned Shia scholars, Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai and Shamas ur Rahman Moawiah, famous Sunni scholars. The worst incidents of sectarian genocide during last decade include bomb blast at Karachi in the gathering of Sunni Tehrik in April, 2006 where top leadership of Sunni Tehrik were killed, killing of Hazara community in Baluchistan in January, 2013, explosion in Abbas Town Karachi in March, 2013 and massacre of innocent people in Rawalpindi on *Youn-e- Ashoor* in November, 2013.

### Effect of Religious Intolerance in Pakistan

The first ideological state of the world, Pakistan, created over a conception as visualized by our cerebral leadership, not through the armaments but through the arguments. During the colonial era, its case was effectively supplicated by Ali brothers, Allama Iqbal and others and finally by the Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. 66 years and two generations have gone during this long period, one which had shaped Pakistan and the second which has inherited it. But much that one would regret, the basic question is still answerable. Our body polity during these six and half decades, had gone through different experiences of governance, fading the basic concept of creation of Pakistan more or less in the background, including the bureaucratization during 1950's, militarization during 1960's, politicization during 1970's, Islamization during 1980's, powerization during

1990's, usurpation and monopolization during the recent era but without conceptualization.

Dearth of leadership and absence of democratic norms have further depreciated the conceptual aptitude of Pakistani masses. For about 35 years the state has been under the military autocrats and the rest of thirty years, although called democratic yet without any true spirit of democracy. The governments of Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League may be taken as a struggle for self-supremacy rather than strengthening democratic institutions. In practical every successive government did just the opposite to the vision of their founding fathers. A model to "lay the foundation of our democracy on the basis of truly Islamic ideals and principles" (Jinnah, 1989: 142) has become a dream yet to be cherished.

### **Politics of Islamization**

Policies of so called Islamization and relegation of democratic forces have given birth to sectarian violence in Pakistan. Co-option and sponsorship of religious groups by successive military governments have brought Pakistan to a point where religious activism threatens to erode the roots of the state and society. By depriving democratic forces of an even playing field and continuing to overlook the need for state policies that would reassure and indeed reflect the country's religious diversity, the governments has permitted religious immoderate organizations and rebellious groups to flourish. It seems unsuccessful to safeguard an exposed judiciary and furnish its law-enforcement agencies with the tools they need to eradicate sectarian violence.

Many religious parties have sought a political role in Pakistan with a vigor and persistence. All are committed to setup an Islamic polity. And none of them has succeeded in creating a mass constituency for itself till the creation of Mutahida Majjlise Amal (MMA) in elections 2002. In spite of political adjustments, disagreements exist yet. "While they represent an Islamic lobby of some consequence, their mutual differences are rooted in sectarian conflicts" (Waseem, 1987: 145). These religiously oriented political groups with their steadfast corps of workers and commendably engaged politico-ideological resources have represented as an unceasing reminder of the Islamic foundation of Pakistan's statehood. Little did the religious parties understand that they were being used by the rulers in their endeavor to fulfill their needs for legitimacy and popular support. During Zia regime in Pakistan Islamic resurgence "came in the wake of a military coup which later sponsored certain selected legal-institutional changes in the name of Islamization" (Ahmad, op.cit. 107).

Religious stimulation in Pakistan became supplementary with increasing sectarianism because the primary focus of Islamization was on the execution of Shariah rather than on the implementation of the fundamental Islamic doctrines of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice. A legalistic approach to Islamization was bound to raise the question as to which, and whose, interpretation

of the Islamic law should form the basis for public policy. Any attempt on the part of the government to apply Shariah was sure to bring to surface the old juristic and doctrinal dissimilarities not only between the Shias and the Sunnis but also among the four Sunni schools themselves. History conforms “that whenever and wherever politics has been made subservient to belief, a battle of sects has been unavoidable. All theocratic polities must inexorably degenerate into tyranny of the dominant sect” (Rehman, 1999: 79).

### **External Actors and Sectarianism**

Besides local anti-state elements, external actors have played their part towards sponsoring sectarianism in Pakistan occasionally directly and otherwise. There are sufficient probabilities of distant contribution in sectarian episodes in Pakistan to weaken this leading Muslim nuclear power. Virtually all sectarian groups, operating in Pakistan, get financial aid from one or another foreign state and those states support such organizations for their own benefits. “The pattern of events suggests that sectarianism is masterminded by internal and external forces that use the indoctrinated youth to further their own interests” (www.crisisgroup.org).

Through this active foreign financial support sectarian organizations are successful in mounting petty religious differences into bloodstained conflicts. Followers of Sunni and Shia sects, who had been living in a fraternal atmosphere for centuries, started confronting each other in more than one Muslim states including Pakistan. “The Shia-Deobandi/Ahle Hadith conflict is in some ways a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the regional champions of their respective brands of Islam” (Ibid). Sectarian scuffle began to escalate about 35 years ago, when Pakistanis watched two events take place in neighboring countries. One, the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, encouraged many Pakistani Shias to claim more rights for their community. The other, the holy war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, incited the Pakistani Sunni majority’s own sense of identity. Prior to 1979, regional developments, the issue of violence in Pakistan had been mostly restricted to infrequent sectarian clashes between the majority Sunni Muslims and the minority Shia Muslims.

After 1979 the entire perspective on violence in Pakistan began to change, during the military government of Zia ul Haq who “crossed the Rubicon after accepting with the encouragement of the United States, millions of dollars in Saudi money” ([http://www.jamestown.org/news\\_details.php?news\\_id=549](http://www.jamestown.org/news_details.php?news_id=549)). With this money Madrasahs mushroomed not only in NWFP and Baluchistan but also in Karachi, Islamabad and Central Punjab. “The jihad in Afghanistan during 1980’s provided an excellent alibi to the religious organizations in Pakistan to receive vast amounts of funds from Middle Eastern Muslim countries in the name of Afghan relief and then use these funds, or part of them, for their sectarian activities” (Ahmad, op.cit.).

When Nawaz Sharif became Prime minister for the second time, the Pakistan government issued a warning to Afghanistan’s ruling Taliban administration,

demanding to stop protecting and training Pakistani sectarian terrorists who are known to be in Kabul, including some on the most wanted list. The then Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif blamed for the first time that the youth trained in Afghanistan were mainly liable for killing Shias in Pakistan and spreading sectarian violence. Despite this apprehension on the part of the government, the sectarian killings did carry on. Embarrassed by their mishandling of sectarian problem, the officials started floating the conspiracy theory that America and other western countries were behind the murders because they want to undermine a possible Islamic revolution in Pakistan. JUI was convinced that the Indian intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), was responsible for the wave of sectarian occurrences in Pakistan. "While discussing the role of external forces in Pakistan's sectarian violence, the hidden hand of the Indian intelligence agencies also cannot be ruled out" (Ahmad, op.cit.).

On the other hand killing of Sunnis on the part of Shias or SMP are generally interrelated with the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 under Imam Khomeini. "Some militant Shia organizations are said to have received unofficial patronage from Tehran. Any future sectarian based tension in Pakistan may intensify this involvement with adverse consequences" (Mahmood, n.d. 346). A reference from Imam Khomeini's letter to the Shias of Pakistan states. "I appreciate the sentiments of sons of Islam and my expectations of them are that they will also liberate their country of imperialism" (Rana, 2004: 419).

As many Sunni groups have participated in Afghan Jihad, similarly many Shias, particularly ISO members went to Iran, to fight against Iraq. During that time the imperial powers in the Arab world got scared of Iran and decided to backing the anti-Shia sentiments throughout the globe, specifically Pakistan has become a host of a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Most of the Pakistani sectarian militants are the by-products of international conflicts.

## **Religious Seminaries**

Religious seminaries (Madrasahs) have been a source of knowledge and producing scholars for centuries. Unluckily, the spread of Madrasahs since 1977 has contributed to the sectarian split. The mushroom growth of 'foreign funded' religious institutions, teaching extremely confrontational courses and serving as recruitment and training centers for sectarian militants, have created an enormous support base for violent activities in Pakistan. It is also a fact that a number of enemy agents, drug mafia and other criminals, under the garb of Mullahs, misusing the situation to further their evil plans and protection of their illegitimate business interests.

The seminaries supported by religious foundations at home and overseas, offer its students free tuition and board, which most of the public and private schools do not. Also the syllabi and courses of these institutions are beyond the state's educational structure with many emphasizing narrow interpretations of faith and little tolerance for dissimilarities. Various Pakistani regimes have encouraged

or accepted the opening of new institutions to compensate for scarcities of schools in Pakistan. With the passage of time the aim of such institutions changed from religious to political as few of them have made attempts to dictate the state authorities their own particular thoughts. The *Lal Masjid* episode is one of the instances of such brands.

### **Illiteracy, Unemployment and Poverty**

Beyond certain limits, illiteracy, unemployment and poverty itself become a crime. Allegiance of an illiterate, unemployed or poverty stricken person can easily be changed or purchased on the strength of illegal black money. Most of the sectarian terrorist organizations in Pakistan have sufficient black money to invest in such projects to safeguard their vested interests. "Widespread illiteracy could be blamed as one of the major causes of extremism in our society. But this (extremism) is not the product of this single factor. Extremism flourishes in poverty" (The News, 2004, April 4).

Absurdly our governments have dejectedly unsuccessful in restructuring our educational system just according to the needs and desires of the unemployed in streets, with degrees in their hands in search of job. Such dissatisfied and desperate youths can easily be fallen into the hands of the agents of sectarian organizations, who abuse them for the fulfillment of their extremist accomplishments. Therefore the leading factor behind sectarian violence is economic for the reason that the unemployed and under privileged sections of society became an easy constituency of those elements whose agenda required creating uncertainty in the state. Had economic and social inconsistencies in our society not been so grave, the intolerance would not have taken a serious turn.

Another psychological factor may also be considered as the cause of bitterness, as the graduates of religious institutions, due to deficiencies of modern learning, cannot compete with the degree holders of formal colleges and universities in the struggle of getting job. Consequently fall in animosity and jealousy against the whole society. Hence compelled by the economic factors, this jobless youth of Pakistan have found an occupation, an ideology and a new family, in the form of militant organizations, in which they find closeness and comradeship. The radical, militant groups have well organized militant devotees. 'The masters of such militants try to uphold the ignorant minds that only their particular version of religion is the true one and that all other beliefs and sects as they exist today are false. This approach logically results in extremism, intolerance, political and social singularization' (Chandio, 2002: 20).

### **Aftermaths of Sectarian Intolerance**

The sectarian vehemence has seriously affected the religious, political, economic, social, and diplomatic businesses of Pakistan. The worst hit area is religion where wide scale intolerance has ruined the social order in the country. Sectarianism has

upraised its ugly head and further threatens to divide Pakistani society on the basis of religious prejudice. Because of this deep-rooted religious bigotry, Islam-religion of peace- is being portrayed as a religion of intolerance, violence, terror and fanaticism, which is contrary to its genuine essence and teaching. Hence much deception, disorder and chaos has been created in the name of faith that an ordinary Muslim is confused and considers the performance of his religious obligations precarious and a threat to his life and property. People feel frightened and insecure of going to the places of worship for prayers because these have become the targets of bomb attacks and gun battles by the zealots. People are killed in broad day light on the busy places.

Taking the advantage of this situation, while different sects of Muslim are busy in mutual aggression, the anti-Islamic elements have entered the ranks of sectarian organizations and start killing the moderate, neutral and enlightened leadership of the Muslims. The killing of Dr. Ghulam Murtaza Malik, Hakeem Muhammad Saeed, Slah ud Din, Zahra Shahid Hussain and many others is the part of a conspiracy, against the sectarian harmony and reconciliation. Such occurrences specify the secret motives of the irreverent powers, aimed at connecting Islam with extremism and terrorism. Through these killings they want to prove that there is no scope in Islam for progression and enlightenment. The adverse propaganda campaign on their part in this regard has, therefore, become a source of discouragement for the unbiased and peace loving intellectuals.

Deterioration in law and order situation has badly affected the economic activity in the country. The ever increasing sectarianism, ethnicity and lawlessness around the business hubs, make it difficult for the foreigners as well as local investors to risk their involvement on a long term basis, (Saeed, 1995: 439). Unsatisfactory security situation keeps the potential foreign investors, particularly, on the sidelines. Safety of capital and security for the personnel involved in the project are necessary components which administer foreign investment. Regrettably, the law and order situation has remained far from contentment in the major growth poles of the country because of sectarian encounters. Karachi, the largest industrial and commercial centers and the only viable port of the country has remained upset in varying degree since 1989. The most violent area is Karachi which indeed topped the list of all districts of Pakistan in terms of social indicators (Waseem, 1997: 717).

Thousands of people from both major sects have been killed including scholars and intellectuals. After every incidence the mourners march through the streets and clash with troops and police who are mobilized to block protests. Vehicles and buildings including banks, shops and government offices are set alight. There are industrial strikes as well, which incurred a loss of millions to the economy of the country. Due to sectarian violence, the law and order situation has also deteriorated in the other parts of the country. It has spread its limbs from Karachi to Gilgit and poses a serious threat to the fragile harmony. "Notwithstanding attractive incentives offered to foreign investors this factor has discouraged them to setup their business in Pakistan" (Khan, 1997: 976).

The intensifying sectarian ferocity has clearly exposed the institutional failure and futile statehood. It is due to this very reason that sectarian organizations have their own militias composed of trained and armed militant youth. They are equipped with the sophisticated arms which is an enough proof of the foreign backing to the assassins and rebels. The killers never feel hesitant to use the weapons and are completely aware of the incapability of country's judicial and legal systems. Such situation suits well to drug mafia and criminals business and for the purpose these powerful gangs move in their trained agents into the ranks of such sectarian and terrorist organizations to seek shelter for their illegal cover.

All such operations and criminal activity are engineered and planned at headquarters of the sectarian organizations under the shelter of their heads. Because of the religious cover, police and other law enforcing agencies usually avoid or hesitate to apprehend such criminals. This state of affair has cheered them to increase and enlarge the circle of their evil activities. As troubled law and order situation provides ideal atmosphere for their unlawful business, so they continue to formulate means for the persistence of sectarian tense situation as long as possible.

Pakistan has been facing a lot of international pressure and humiliation due to the menace of sectarianism. With the growing cases of violence against the nationals of friendly countries like Iran, China, France, decline in the relationship to some extent, can be perceived. There came many ups and downs in the Pak-Iran ties, particularly, due to sectarian violence against the Shia Muslims in Pakistan. Tehran and Islamabad both say they want to preserve good neighbourly relations but there are two main obstacles which frequently strain their efforts to do so. The one is Afghanistan and the other is sectarian violence in Pakistan, which regularly escalates clashes between extremist Sunni and Shia militants. Hundreds of Shia pilgrims, while returning from Iran, have been killed by their sectarian rivals.

LeJ due to its links with al-Qaeda has made many strikes against the American and western interests in Pakistan. The slaughter of Wall Street Journal Danial Pearl, killing of 11 French nationals in 2002 and attack on Sri Lankan cricket team in 2009, created many difficulties for Pakistan on diplomatic front. Pakistan is thus paying a heavy price for its fundamentalist group's adventurism, both in terms of a loss of valuable human lives and in the threats it continuously faces from the world's powerful countries of harsh economic and military sanctions for its failure to deal with the terrorist organizations. The government's resolve to adopt an extraordinary strict policy against the sectarian organizations is always proving to be a phony. Even with few strict measures the chain of sectarian violence is still unbroken, at least at national level.

## Conclusion

Sectarian killings and extremism in Muslim societies have posed a serious threat to peace loving citizens. Islam is being projected, of course erroneously, by the non-Muslims and particularly by the western media, as a religion of vehemence and intolerance. Islam and violence is associated so profoundly that one can hardly

associate it with harmony and reconciliation. It is also supposed that any attempt to bring out compromise between Islam and peace may result in an abstract adjustment rather than a tangible scheme. But study of the Holy Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet (PBUH) shows a different rather true picture of Islam. The fact is that Islam is neither a religion of violence, nor violence is integral to this religion. Islam is a religion (*Deen*) of nature, free from all categories of sectarian splits. It means submission to the will of God Almighty in the one hand, and instituting peace on the other. The word for peace in Arabic is "*Slam*". When Muslim meet each other, they reciprocate saying *Assalam-o-Alaykum* (peace be on you). Hence it is a religious obligation of Muslim to endeavor for setting up a peaceful society. So Islam means establishment of peace and Muslim means establisher of peace through his deeds and character. A true Muslim lives and dies in submission to Allah and in the establishment of peace in this world. Telling the merits of believers Allah says in the Holy Quran "The believers are nothing else than brothers (in Islamic religion) so make peace and reconciliation between your brothers and fear Allah, that you may receive mercy" (49 :10).

How painful it is that this very *Deen* is not only divided into various sects, in desecration of basic doctrine of Islam, but each sect asserts itself to be on right track and all others are mistaken and misinformed and are worth killing. Thus slayings are going on, and the sectarian ruthlessness has been sweeping through the whole society confronting all the law enforcing machinery and what we realize all around is a flood of sectarianism across the country. The disaster is that the passionate militants of different organization are being constantly ill-advised by the religious clergy, that whatever they are doing is a service to religion. 'It is not surprising therefore that even after years and years of ceaseless failure since the creation of Pakistan, these 'holy men' are still unable to learn from their mistakes and still oblivious to the actual challenge they face' (Ifikhar, 1999: 19).

Apportioning Muslims into sects, denominations and groups is an evil and a warning to them from Allah is "As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, thou hast no part in them in the least: their affair is with Allah: He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they did". (6:159)

The foremost challenge faced by the state and society of Pakistan is sectarian violence. By killing Muslims, whether Sunnis or Shias at places of religious workshop, the country's image in the international community is critically distorted. It is disastrous that Islam is being projected as a religion of violence and extremism. Suicide attacks and target killings means the state apparatus has failed to check those elements who are involved in such atrocious offenses. It is well if the government takes a serious notice of unrestricted sectarian violence and harshly penalizes those who are involved in the progression of homicides.

It is heartbreaking that our Ulema and Zakirs instead of speaking love, tolerance and harmony are promoting petty differences which are far less in number than the common blessings of Islam. They must focus on acknowledged and undeniable beliefs for the sake of national unity and peace. At the societal level, those who expound hatred against fellow Muslims should be rejected

## South Asian Studies 29 (2)

because their coldhearted deeds have a tendency to cause colossal damage to Pakistan at different levels.

Prejudice and intolerance whether religious or political, habitually transmit within it the seeds of social conflict. Those who are pampering in the situation must understand it for the betterment of the state, society and their own children. The time has come to take strong actions to apprehend the upsurge of sectarian violence far-reaching all corners of the country. The law and rules essentially be enforced objectively and their compliance confirmed. Government must thrust aside lethargy and unconcern and adopt pragmatism in law enforcement. Human development can be deferred but not the life and security of the citizen, the primary obligation of any state.

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