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*Zikris of Baluchistan: Muslims but Different?*

**Abstract:**

The *Zikris* is a distinct group of religious followers, who are mainly concentrated in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. There are some *Zikris* who are settled in Karachi and Iran as well. Some people believe that they are the followers of Syed Mohammad Jaunpuri but others disagree and they say that they believe in Prophet Mohammad as the last Prophet and Holy Quran as the last divine book. While many orthodox Muslims consider them heretics and infidels, some believe that they are one of the off shoots of a Sufi order, who have branched off from the Nimatollahi Sufi order of Iran. Few centuries back the whole of Makran was *Zikri* and there existed a *Zikri* state as well in Baluchistan.

Why they are known as *Zikirs*? Actually, *Zikr* is Arabic word which means remembrance, usually of Allah. According to traditions their name is because of their religious practices, as they unlike mainstream Muslims do not pray five times a day but perform *Zikr* five times a day instead. Unlike the main stream Muslims their prayer house is known as *Zikrkhana*.

Currently the *Zikris* are living in quite large numbers in one of the important deep-sea port-city of Pakistan, Viz. Gwadar. According to an estimate 50 per cent population of Gwadar are *Zikris*. Thus, besides being one of the many religious groups of Pakistan they are located in a very important future city of Pakistan, which is extremely important for Pakistan–China relations as well.

About their religious beliefs and customs there are many stories and legends, which can be discussed in the main paper and presentation.

**Introduction:**

The *Zikris of Baluchistan* is a distinct group of religious followers, who are mainly concentrated in the Pakistani province of *Baluchistan*. (Some scholars believe that in India and some other parts of the world<sup>1</sup> the same sect is known as *Mahdawi*. Some sources also name them *Dais*). The *Zikris* can be found in Baluchistan such as Makran, Quetta and Gawadar. They can also be found in Kallag, Pasni, and the Dasht valley of Gwadar. There are some *Zikris* who are settled in Karachi and Iran as well. Though it is difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of *Zikris* (as *Zikris* normally declare themselves as Sunni Muslims when voting), according to some estimates the *Zikris* numbers can be between 750,000 to 800,000 at present.<sup>2</sup> Some people believe that they are the followers of Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri, a 15<sup>th</sup> century South Asian Muslim religious leader but others disagree and they say that they are the followers of Noor Pak. Who was Noor Pak is not clear. Yet some believe that they follow Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the last Prophet and Holy Quran as the last divine book. While many orthodox Muslims consider them heretics and infidels, some believe that they are one of the off shoots of a Sufi orders, who have branched off from the Niamatollahi Sufi order of Iran.

Few centuries back the whole of Makran was *Zikri* and there existed a *Zikri* state as well. The *Zirki* state was put to decline by the expansionist policies of rulers of Kalat particularly by Khan Nasir Khan whose forces killed Malik Dinar, the last *Zikri* ruler, and massacred large number of *Zikris*. His iron fist policy compelled large number of *Zikris* to convert to Sunni Islam.

*Zikris* take their name from the Arabic word *Zikr*, which means in Arabic remembrance, usually of Allah. Though they claim to be Muslims, many orthodox Muslims do not consider them as such due to their customs and religious beliefs.

Currently the *Zikris* are living in quite large numbers in one of the important deep-sea port-city of Pakistan, Viz. Gwadar. According to an estimate 50 per cent population of Gwadar are *Zikris*. Thus besides being one of the many religious groups of Pakistan they are located in a very important future city of the country, which is extremely important for Pakistan–China relations as well.

**Historical Background:**

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The overwhelming majority of Zikris speak Baluchi but there are some who also speak Brahui and live in the Jahlawan region of Khuzdar district.<sup>3</sup> The Brahui call Zikri *Dai*, supposedly derived from the Baluchi word *Dah*, which means “message.” According to this version the Zikris call Holy Quran *Dai*.<sup>4</sup>

Zikris had their own state for some time, whose boundaries stretched up to Lasbela and Khuzdar in the east, Kharan on the north and Minab and Kirman on the west and on the south was Baluchi coast where also the people professed Zikriism. Their state was attacked by a Sunni religious zealot, the ruler of Kalat, Khan Nasir Khan during his raids from 1757 to 1795 AD. He killed the last ruler of Zikri state, Malik Dinar and continued to devastate Zikris’ towns and villages for 40 years by his raids, during which he killed thousands of Zikris and large number of them were forcibly converted to Sunni Islam. But as late as British rule in Baluchistan they had found more than half of the present Makran region following Zikri doctrines.<sup>5</sup>

According to some scholars Zikri sect came into existence in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Jaunpur, an Indian city in the province of Gujrat. The sect was founded by Syed Muhammad (1443-1505).<sup>6</sup> This fact can also be confirmed by two Zikri books which are in the possession of Zikri elders. These two books are *Safar Nama-e-Mahdi* (Wanderings of the Mahdi) and the *Tardid-e-Mahdawayat* (Refutation of the Dispensation of the Mahdi). Syed Muhammad was born in Jaunpur in the state of Danapur, India. He is variously referred to as Syed and Afghan.<sup>7</sup> According to well-known courtier of Mughal emperor Akbar, Abul Fazl, who has been quoted in a book titled *Baluchistan through the Ages*, “Saïad Muhammad Jaunpuri was the son of Saïad Budha Uwaysi. He received instructions under many holy men learned in spiritual and secular knowledge. Carried away by extravagance he laid claim to be a Mahdi and many followers gathered round him and numerous miracles are ascribed to him. He is the founder of the Mahdawi sect....”<sup>8</sup>

Though the sect was founded in Jaunpur, India, the question arises that how it flourished in Makran, Baluchistan? Some sources state that it was most probably spread in Makran by some of his *Khalifas* as they believe that “The story of the introduction of Mahdawi doctrines into Makran by Saïad Muhammad bears self-evident indications of improbability....”<sup>9</sup> The most probable person who introduced Mahdawi/Zikri sect in Baluchistan was Mian Abdullah Niazi who carried great influence in India. It is also believed that the introduction of this new sect is synchronous with the foundation of Buledai rule in Makran, as prior to the Buledai rule there is no evidence of the Zikri sect in the area. It is thus believed that the first ruler of Buledai, Bu Said, could be responsible for the growth and spread of Zirki faith. During the Buledai rule the faith flourished and spread throughout the country. Mulla Murad, Gichki, who brought to an end the Buledai rule in the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century, gave further impetus to the growth of Zikri sect. Mulla Murad was a devout Zikri and he introduced many rites in the religion, such as “...choosing Koh-i-Murad near Turbat as the Kaaba of the Zikris for their annual pilgrimage and digging a well known as *Chah-e-sam sam* in front of the Turbat fort....”<sup>10</sup>

### **Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri:**

Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri was born on 10 September 1443 AD/*Jamadi-ul-Awal* 847 AH in Jaunpur. His father name was Syed Khan, who was also known as Budh Uwaisi and BiBi Aaq Malik. Syed Muhammad from the early age showed great abilities of heart and mind. At the age of seven (7) he memorized the Holy Quran and when he was 12 years old his teacher Shaikh Danyal Chisthi gave him the title of *Asad-ul-Ulema*. At the age of 40 he went to Hajj and during circumambulation announced himself to be the promised Mahdi but the *Ulema* of Mecca ignored him and then he returned back to Gujrat.<sup>11</sup>

Syed Muhammad was a pious and devout Muslim, who was concentrating on preaching not only to Muslims but to the non-Muslims as well. With the passage of time his reputation spread in the surrounding areas. Sultan Hussain, the ruler of Danapur where the town of Jaunpur was also located, heard of his reputation and one day visited him. Sultan Hussain was so much impressed by his personality, character and teaching that he became his follower. Later on the request of Sultan Hussain, Syed Muhammad also accompanied him to his capital where he continued his preaching. It was here that he preached *Jihad* against Dilip Roy, a strong Hindu ruler of Gor. Though Sultan Hussain neither had the courage nor the resources to defeat this powerful Hindu ruler, he could not refuse due to Syed Muhammad influence. When the battle started between the two forces, Dilip Roy was at the verge of defeating Sultan Hussain forces but due to Syed Muhammad and his followers’ bravery and frenzied fighting Dilip Roy was defeated and Sultan Hussain conquered his state.<sup>12</sup>

Though it was due to Syed Muhammad and his followers' bravery that the state of Dilip Roy was subjugated, he was not interested in worldly affairs. After 12 years stay with Sultan Hussain, Syed Muhammad embarked upon travel and preaching once again and left Sultan Hussain state with his followers. But due to his ideas of being Mahdi he faced tough resistance from the orthodox *Ulemas* everywhere. To what extent Syed Muhammad ideas were un-Islamic is difficult to say as he has not left any writings and one cannot believe on all those allegations which the opponents have levelled against him. Due to opponents' propaganda and even persecution he along with his followers wandered through many places such as Sind, Baluchistan and up to Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> Syed Muhammad died at the age of 62 in 1505 AD at Farrah and was buried there.<sup>14</sup>

After the death of Syed Muhammad his *Khalifas* succeeded him. The first *Khalifa* was his son, Syed Mahmud. During the leadership of Syed Mahmud the sect came to be known as Mahdawi and had established many centers called *dairas* (circles). The sect succeeded in gaining popularity amongst the masses, which alarmed the state feeling threatened from the Mahdawis. This led to the arrest, persecution and incarceration of Syed Mahmud and his followers on the charges of heresy. Syed Mahmud died in the prison. Though the sect attracted some prominent personalities who joined it, the *Ulema* opposition gained momentum especially after the *Ulemas* of Gujrat's *fatwa* declaring the Mahdawis heretic and their killings religiously permitted. By 1576 AD the sect had practically perished as its followers had dwindled significantly, however, they survived persecutions and harassments and even in the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries their adherents can be found in different parts of the world, such as Iran, Gulf States and in some areas of India such as Hyderabad, Mysore and Gujrat. The sect is known as Zikris in Pakistan who have their habitats in Sind and *Baluchistan*.<sup>15</sup>

The most important aspect of the Zikri sect is their circle. They even refer themselves as "people-of-the-circle". The importance of the circle can be observed in all of their religious rituals, for example annual *ziarat* of Koh-i-Murat, *chogan* and *kishti*. During all these rituals they form a circle and a woman or a group of women with strong and melodious voice(s) stand in the middle. The women sing melodiously, the men dance in circle and respond. The importance of the circle can also be witnessed from the fact that they even refer to their settlements as *dairas* (circles). But circle is not unique to the Zikris as Durre S. Ahmed quotes from Jung who has worked extensively on the importance of circles in different religions and cultures. She writes, "...circle is a universally-occurring and powerful symbol, that is, a representation of the idea of the Divine. The circle represents totality having no beginning or end, hence the saying "God is a circle whose circumference is nowhere and center everywhere," almost every culture uses the circle as a depiction of cosmological order and perfection...."<sup>16</sup>

Circle also has a great importance in the rituals of Sufis in Islam. Another distinction of Sufism is that they give importance to women contrary to the orthodox Islam. Thus Zikris importance to women is nothing unique rather Zikris too are considered by many as one form of Sufi Islam. Jung believes that Sufism is the backbone of Islam, while Amaury de Reincourt outlines how Sufism emerged as a reaction to the uncompromising monotheism of orthodox Islam:

"The massive theological superstructure that Muslims elaborated during the first three or four centuries following Muhammad's death was a replica of the Christian one; but it never satisfied the Muslim soul: sternly ethical and dryly philosophical, it made no appeal to sentiment, emotion or intuition. So it was the mysticism soon appeared within the confines of Islam in the guise of Sufism, to enlist the enthusiastic support of the masses, not expressed directly in the increasingly repressed Muslim women but in the feminine emotionalism of Islamic mysticism...."<sup>17</sup>

### **Zikri Doctrines:**

The question of doctrines of any religion, sect or group is a very difficult and problematic matter because human nature is so diverse. This diversity is evident in variations of beliefs and practices within a religion or group. The Zikris are no exception. Material, interviews from the Zikris themselves, scholars opinion and other accounts present diversity of different practices and beliefs. One main reason of lack of detailed information about their belief system lies in the fact that most of their historical records along with original writings of their founder Syed Muhammad Ahmed were destroyed during the campaigns of Mir Nasir Khan of Kalat in 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Further the Zikris also do not allow the non-Zikris to either participate or observe their religious practices and customs. The result of the lack of reliable material is that most of the accounts of the Zikri customs, traditions and beliefs are based on the Islamic Sunni Orthodoxy which strongly rejects the Zikris' claim of being Muslims.<sup>18</sup>

The well-known beliefs of Zikris can be elucidated as following:

→ Some scholars believe that the Zikri consider Nur Pak as their Prophet and promised Mahdi. According to them he was a primordial figure who lived before Adam and will return again before *akhir zaman* to reform Islam. They believe that he returned in the 15<sup>th</sup> century revealing new teachings. The Zikri revere Holy Prophet Muhammad but they believe that his teachings are superseded by that of *Khodo dad*, the “gift of God”, an ambiguous figure who have lived seven generations earlier.<sup>19</sup>

→ However, other believe that Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri was their prophet and Mahdi. The Zikris believe “That the dispensation of the Prophet Muhammad has come to an end and he has been superseded by the Mahdi.”<sup>20</sup> Zikris also believe that Holy Prophet Muhammad mission was to preach *Holy Quran* according to its literal meaning, while Syed Mahdi (Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri), who is the founder of the Zikris, responsibility was to interpret the meaning of *Holy Quran* as he was *Sahib-e-Taweel* (Master of Interpretation).<sup>21</sup> Some people say that Zikris by themselves do not recognize Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri as their Mahdi or Prophet. Rather there is confusion about who was Mahdi? Some claims that Zikris record shows that Mahdi was born in AH 977, i.e. 67 years after the death of Sayed Muhammad Jaunpuri. There records also mention that he lived for 6 years in the city of Lar, in the province of Fars, Iran; and ten years in Kech, which now is known as Turbat, Baluchistan.<sup>22</sup>

→ Yet there is another view who believes that Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet and *Holy Quran* is the last book but Imams continued coming after Prophet Muhammad and Mahdi was the last Imam. Who had come and gone back.<sup>23</sup>

→ The question of true Mahdi or Prophet of Zikris is debatable but the Zikris’ *Murshid* claim direct descent from a Sufi of Kirman (Iran), Shah Niamatuallah Wali. On the basis of this view some people believe that the Zikri faith is an offshoot of Sufi Islam. When the Zikri Baluch came into power they gave it an independent colour and established the Zikri Baluch Kingdom.

→ The Zikris recite the *Kalima* differently than the Muslims. Their *Kalima* states, “No God but God and Muhammad Mahdi is His messenger.”<sup>24</sup> There is another view that they recite their *Kalima* as following: “God is God, but the mother of Muhammad is his prophet.”<sup>25</sup> Yet there is another view which say that the Zikris recite their *Kalima* as following: “*la ilaha illallah, Muhammad Mahdi Rasul-ullah.*”<sup>26</sup>

→ *Zikr* is very important worship amongst the Zikris. It is referred particularly for the recitation of the names of Allah. *Zikr* is an Arabic word which actually means “remembrance” and is practiced amongst the Muslim world widely. In *Zikr* either the names of Allah are recited or some sacred phrases. It is difficult to state whether *Zikr* is complete substitute of *Salat* (Muslim prayers) or not, as the lateral has many postural elements. While *Salat* is performed five times a day, *Zikr* is performed six times a day.<sup>27</sup> Zikris are known as Zikris because of their *Zikr*, and they call the Muslims as *Nimazi* due to the performance of *Nimaz* (Prayers) by the Muslims.<sup>28</sup>

→ Instead of keeping fast in the month of Ramadan, the Zikris keep seven days fast each month of the year.

→ They believe in the equal economic system which they call *Sawiyat*. By this they mean the equal distribution of wealth and material possession. Each Zikri community forms a *daira* (circle), and all material wealth is owned collectively. Their view of society is egalitarian and they abhor personal property in favour of collective ownership.<sup>29</sup> Rather there is a view that they avoid to own this world and the worldly things.<sup>30</sup>

→ The Zikris instead of *Zakat* at the rate of 1/40<sup>th</sup> have adopted *Ushr* at the rate of 1/10<sup>th</sup>.<sup>31</sup>

→ Zikris put greater emphasis on help to each other and they don’t take into account ethnic origin.

→ Unlike the orthodox Muslims the Zikri women actively participate in their religious and socio-political life.<sup>32</sup>

→ Shaun R. Gregory and Simon R. Valentine write that the Zikris do not go for the performance of *Hajj*, which is a religious obligation in Islam on all those people who have the means to perform it. Instead of going to *Hajj* the Zikris go to Koh-e-Murad in the city of Turbat, Baluchistan, where they perform special rituals.<sup>33</sup> It is written in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Baluchistan* that the Zikris consider Koh-e-Murad as their *Kaa’ba*.<sup>34</sup>

### **Rituals of Zikris:**

**Zikr:** The most distinguished ritual of the Zikris is the *Zikr*, from which they also derive their name. *Zikr* is widespread amongst all Muslims, in which they recite the different names of God, passages from the Quran and the first part of the *Kalima*, “No God but God”. The Zikris do it six times a day (Some scholars believe that they do it five times like Muslim prayers.<sup>35</sup>) *Zikr* can be *Jali* (loudly) and *Khafi* (silently). Some *Zikrs* are done individually while some are done collectively like the Islamic prayers. However, Zikris perform their *Zikrs* different than the orthodox Muslims. Though they build their prayer houses like mosques, they call them *Zikrkhanas*. Like mosques they do not make directions of it towards *Kaa’ba* in Mecca neither it has pulpit. Their *Zikrkhanas* generally have stones and mats on which they sit in circle for *Zikr*. During *Zikr* facing *Kaa’ba* is not mandatory for them. Further they do not perform *Zikr* in rows; rather they do it in circles. After doing different stages of *Zikr*, they prostrate on the ground in circle thus facing each other instead of *Kaa’ba*.<sup>36</sup>

There are numerous *Zikrs* and each one is of ten to twelve lines, which they perform six times daily as following:

- i. The *Zikr* of *la ilaha illallah*, a *Zikr-e-Khafi*: Zikris are required to repeat this *Zikr* thirteen times before early dawn at home. It must be noted that all *Zikrs* starts with this one.
- ii. *Gwar-bam* or the *Zikr* of early dawn: This *Zikr* is consisted of the words *subhanala-yurju* and is recited loudly, which means it is *Zikr-e-Jali*. After the *Zikr* they perform *sijda* (prostration). After the prostration they do another *Zikr* which is *Zikr-e-Khafi* by stating, *la ilaha, hasbi-rubbi*, and *jallallah jallallah*, when the sun rises they do another prostration.
- iii. *Nemroch-i-Zikr*, the mid-day *Zikr*: The *Zikrs* are *Jali* except when they repeat the words *subhana, la-yarju*. In these *Zikrs* there is no prostration which is unique to the *subhan* formula.
- iv. *Roch-zard-e-Zikr*, the *Zikr* of the yellow day, which is shortly before sun-set: This is a *Khafi Zikr*, which ends with *subhan* formula and they make *sijda* at the time of sun-set.
- v. *Sar-shap-e-Zikr*, the *Zikr* for the beginning of night: This *Zikr* is a *jali Zikr*, which is performed around 10 pm. All the *Zikrs* are pronounced loudly except when they repeat *subhan*.
- vi. *Nem-hangam-e-Zikr*, the midnight *Zikr*: This is a *khafi Zikr*, which is repeated by individuals. In order to perform it properly the words *la-ilaha* should be repeated 1000 times, while after every 100 times a *sijda* should be performed.<sup>37</sup>

**Fasting:** There are contradictory reports about Zikris keeping fast in the month of *Ramadhan* or not. However, they fast for one week before *Eid-ul-Azha* which is not practiced by the Muslims.

**Annual Ziarat:** The Zikri perform annual pilgrimage to Koh-i-Murad in Turbat, *Baluchistan*, on every 27<sup>th</sup> *Ramadhan*. Koh-i-Murad actually means the “the mountain of wish”, and is attributed to one of their spiritual leaders. While in the Muslim world the 27<sup>th</sup> *Ramadhan* is considered a sacred one and Muslims recite special prayers and *Holy Quran*, the Zikris make a pilgrimage to Koh-i-Murad. It is believed that each year on this day around 20,000 to 30,000 Zikris gather near the mountain for pilgrimage. First they perform *Zikr* in a circle and then start climbing on the mountain barefooted. While climbing there is no segregation between men and women. On their way to the top they touch and kiss a stone, on which is inscribed the *Kalima*. During their ascent to the mountain the Zikris also drink water from a spring they call “*zamzam*”, namesake of the spring near *Kaa’ba*.<sup>38</sup>

**Chogan:** During the annual *ziarat* when the Zikris reach the top of Koh-i-Murad. They form a circle around a modest hut-like dwelling. Inside the hut must be sitting a Zikri woman with melodious and strong voice, who sings melodiously the Baluch verses and the encircling Zikris respond in chorus and dance in circle around the hut. They sing, clap and dance rhythmically in traditional Baluch dance steps.<sup>39</sup>

**Kishti:** This is a Zikri ritual which is performed monthly on a Friday night falling after 14 or 15<sup>th</sup> of each month on the night of the full moon. This is also performed during the first ten days of the month of *Zil Hijjah* (one of the months of the Islamic Calendar) and the day after the *Eid-ul-Azha*. This rite is also enacted on the occasions of births, marriage and circumcision. For this rite the Zikri make a circle and one or more women with strong and melodious voice(s) stand in the middle of the circle and sing melodiously and praise the Mahdi. The men in circle dance in typical Baluch steps and respond in chorus. The singers change with change in songs. Many songs also make some queries and the men respond. For example the women sing and ask — *hadia?* (who is the leader on the right path?) the men respond *Gul Mahdia* (our flower, the Mahdi).<sup>40</sup>

During this ritual drums are not beaten but songs are sung. In the towns and villages *Kishti* is performed separately by men and women but among the hill Zikris there are no separate *Kishti* rather they perform it together. The ritual continues until all are tired. The allegations that during these rituals immoral and incestuous acts are performed are baseless, which are most likely spread by bigoted and extremist opponents.<sup>41</sup>

#### **Burial Rites:**

The Zikris bury their dead bodies according to the rest of Muslims' traditions except one major difference, which is that the Zirkis do not perform religious service or prayers for the dead body.<sup>42</sup>

#### **Persecution of Zikris:**

The followers of Zikris' sect have faced persecution throughout its five hundred years of existence. In 18<sup>th</sup> century a tribal leader and a devout Muslim, Nasir Khan, declared Jihad against them and launched many military expeditions against them. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the British conquered Sind, many Zikris migrated there to escape the persecution and harassment of fellow Sunni Muslims. While after the creation of Pakistan they face the same problem at the hands of extremist religious leaders.<sup>43</sup> Many times religious leaders from both sides of Pakistan-Iran border have called for *Jihad* against them and had made organized efforts to either eliminate or convert them to Islam.<sup>44</sup>

Durre S. Ahmad believes that though the Zikris have faced religious persecutions throughout the history, she considers those actions mostly motivated by political reasons. She particularly highlights one of their beliefs which led the state authorities to launch crack down on them. This is their belief of equal distribution of wealth. A very strong movement was launched against the Zikris in Makran (Durre S. Ahmad has mentioned it as Mehran, which is wrong as Mehran is used for Sindh), *Baluchistan* in 18<sup>th</sup> century by Mir Nasir Khan of Kalat, in which thousands of Zikris were killed, forcibly converted, and their state was annihilated, but many accounts indicate that basically it was an expansionist drive instead of a movement against heresy. Mir Nasir Khan made many attacks on the state of Zikris in Makran, during which many precious records and text were also destroyed.<sup>45</sup>

The Zikris beliefs in liberal and secular politics have always clashed with the state politics, which have resulted in their persecutions by the state authority. The Zikris do not believe in the accumulation of wealth and personal property rather they strongly believe in egalitarianism, on the pattern of Marxist distribution of wealth. Though overall the Zikris are an impoverished community, it had its effects on the social structure of society particularly on the status of women. This is obvious from the fact that the Zikri women are not compelled to follow the strict Baluch or orthodox Islamic customs.<sup>46</sup>

Durre S. Ahmed writes about the political motives of Zikris persecution in these words, "This inherent "liberal socialism," along with the fact that they are a religious minority, make the Zikris a regional political force since they continue to vote for those with a secular point of view. Once this lack of support is identified by the religious extremist politicians, theology is used to erode it."<sup>47</sup> One of the reasons for the orthodox *Ulema* opposition to Zikris is their belief that Syed Muhammad Ahmed of Jaunpur was the promised Mahdi. But the fact of the matter is that all Islamic schools do not agree on the same concept of Mahdi. Thus the Zikris concept of Mahdi is not of paramount importance but those are their practices which make them target for the orthodox *Ulemas*.<sup>48</sup>

The orthodox Muslims also allege many immoral acts presumably done by the Zikris, which the former make a point for their harassment and persecution. About such immoral acts Vahe Boyajian-Surenians says that his informant, Jan-Mohammad Hoseinbor told him that, "...every year, on special day, the Zikris gather around the Koh- i-Morad and perform orgiastic rites, giving freedom to their corporal wishes, committing promiscuity, and so on. The Zikri husbands, according to Hoseinbor, even personally offer their wives to the local *mullah (khwajeh)*, who presides over the orgy, in order to attain Divine Grace and Mercy..."<sup>49</sup> However, almost all scholars agree that these are mostly concocted stories without any basis.

According to 2009 UNHCR writenet report generally the Zikris are free to practice their religion and do not face persecution but they are looked down upon by their fellow Muslims and ostracized and call them *bhangee* (dirty people) and *jahalat* (backward/ignorance) and pressure is put on them to convert to Sunni Islam. The pressure on Zikris is mainly put by *Jamiat-ul-Ulama-e-Islam*, *Jamaat-e-Islami* and lately by *Anjuman Sipah-e-Sahaba* (which

was declared banned by the government of Pakistan, due to which it changed her name to *Ahle Sunnat wal Jammat*). *Sipah-e-Sahaba* in 1994 tried to unsuccessfully introduce legislation which would have declared Zikris non-Muslims on the pattern of Ahmadis.<sup>50</sup>

### **Muslims of a Different Kind:**

The history of Pakistan is replete with the controversy of who can be called a Muslim or *Musalman*. In 1972 in the National Assembly, on some Islamic legislation, controversy started over the definition of Muslim/*Musalman*. The then Federal Minister for Religious and Minorities Affairs, *Maulana* Kausar Niazi challenged the *Ulema* to come up with a consensus definition of a Muslim. The *Ulemas* accepted this challenge and came up with a definition which was passed from the National Assembly in the form of a resolution, which was presented by *Maulana* Abdul Haq. According to this definition a 'Muslim' or '*Musalman*' has,

“to accept and acknowledge the Unity of God, to believe in Holy Quran, Divine Books, *Sunnah*, the traditions of the Holy Prophet of Islam and all about the Messenger of God, and also in the Prophet of Islam as being the last of all prophets thereby meaning that Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) is '*Nabi-e-Akhir-uz-Zaman*', and to believe in all that he has brought and not to believe in any body as either '*zilli*' or '*barozi*' or '*tabai*' or permanent or any kind of Prophet after him.”<sup>51</sup>

There are various accounts about the doctrine and rituals of Zikris, which makes it really difficult to truly understand their beliefs. For example in spite of many claims, which have been made about their practices and beliefs, one opinion is that Zikris perform all five tenets of Islam, such as *Hajj*, *Roza* (fasting), *Zakkat* (compulsory wealth tax) and all *Shahadah*. Further it is opined that Zikris perform *Hajj* but they also make the annual pilgrimage to Koh-e-Morad.<sup>52</sup>

Durre S Ahmad believes that after studying the doctrines of Zikris one cannot find anything abhorrent to Islam. She places them in the category of Sufis in Islam, who do not believe so strictly like Orthodox Muslims in the rituals of Islam. She writes, “Placed in its wider social and historical context, the Zikris are one among an enormous spectrum of Sufi movements and sects, not only within the sub-continent but as they variedly occur across the Islamic world. As such, none of the main doctrinal elements are exclusive to the Zikris. The Alawis, for example, in North Africa, Central Asia and Turkey, also do not place great emphasis on the ritual prayers or *salat*. The practice of *salat* itself is varied in its personal details in the Islamic world....”<sup>53</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) has stated once that amongst his followers there will be 73 sects but only one will be on the right path. How and who shall determine which one is on the right path because each sect has its own arguments in favor of themselves that they are the one truly guided. In the last 1400 years or more the Muslim world has not agreed upon the rightly guided sect and they have been arguing and fighting with each other without any conclusion. These arguments, counter-arguments and fighting have damaged the Muslims and Islam more than anything else. The extremist elements in each sect declare all others as non-Muslims or *Kafir*.

In Pakistan this trend is even more common to declare each other as *Kafir*. After the creation of Pakistan the first movement was launched for the declaration of (then included amongst the Muslims sects) the *Ahmadis/Qadianis* as non-Muslims. Though initially it failed in its objective later it succeeded when in the 1973 Constitution they were officially declared non-Muslims. This declaration encouraged the orthodox elements and they started targeting other Muslim sects to be declared non-Muslims as well including Zikris. In order to officially declare the Zikris as non-Muslims the banned religious outfit *Sipah-e-Sahaba, Pakistan* moved a bill in the parliament in 1994 to declare them non-Muslims but it failed.

Such kind of initiatives/movements has benefited neither Islam nor Pakistan rather it has plunged the country into serious sectarian problem and also has damaged the image of Islam worldwide. Instead of considering the religion of Islam as a peaceful and accommodating religion, the non-Muslims started considering it now a religion of intolerance and violence.

In order to convey a better and soft image of Islam to the rest of the world we need to show tolerance, accommodation, and large heartedness. Religion should remain between God and His creatures and nobody else should force anyone to convert to any particular sect of Islam because Allah is Al-mighty if He ever wished or

wishes, He could have made the whole humanity the follower of one particular religion or sect. If He is not doing it, human beings should refrain from doing it because it would be challenging the Will of God as what He does not want people want to do it.

Famous Islamic scholar and Imam of an Islamic sect, Imam Shafi statement that I know that what I believe is right but I respect the other belief as well because there is a possibility that he may also be right is (in my opinion) the right path to go for unity amongst the Muslims and avoid sectarianism.

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## End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> There is one sect by the name of Zikri in the city of Harare, an important place of Islamic learning in Ethiopia. They are also known as Zikri because of the *Zikr* which they do on the pattern of Zikri Baluch. They are considered a sufi order. ("Zikri in Harar: Introduction to Zikri rituals," < <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/music/zikri> > (Accessed on 6 March 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Shaun R. Gregory and Simon R. Valentine, "Pakistan: The Situation of Religious Minorities," UNHCR Writernet Report, May 2009, <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4b01856e2html> > (accessed on 1 April 2014).

<sup>3</sup> "Zikri (Labaik Ya Imam Mahdi), Zikris in Balochistan (BALOCH ZIKRIS IN BALOCHISTAN), <<http://www.facebook.com/Zikrilabaikyaimammehdi/posts/585071361525247>> (accessed on 5 March 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Selection from Government Record, *Baluchistan Through The Ages (District Gazetteers)* (Quetta: Nisa Traders, 1980), p. 570.

<sup>5</sup> Zikri (Labaik Ya Imam Mahdi),

<sup>6</sup> Durre S. Ahmed, "The Zikris of Pakistan. A Case Study", *InterCulture: Listening to Other Islams*, Bi-annual Research Journal of Intercultural Institute of Montreal, N 151, October 2006, p. 9. Available on line, [interculture@virgilio.it](mailto:interculture@virgilio.it).

According to other sources the founder of the sect was an Indian sufi saint Nur Pak, who the Zikris consider a prophet as well as the promised Mahdi. "In their eschatological teaching reference is made to Nur Pak, meaning "pure light", a primordial figure who lived before Adam, and who is expected to return before the *akhir zaman*, "the last days" to bring about the reformation of Islam. Zikris believe that Nur Pak returned in the fifteenth century revealing new teachings. Although they revere the prophet Muhammad the Zikris believe that his dispensation is superseded by that of *Khodo dad*, the "gift of God", a vaguely defined figure to have lived "seven generations ago." (Shaun R. Gregory and Simon R. Valentine).

There is yet another view which says that the Zikris prophet had appeared at Attock, in the Punjab province of Pakistan who they call Mehdi. The Zikris believe that he disappeared somewhere in Mekran, Baluchistan and later would reappear. (A.W.Hughes, *The Country of Baluchistan: Its Geography, Topography, Ethnicity and History* (Quetta: Gosh-e-Adab, 1977), p.44.

<sup>7</sup> Selection from Government Record, p.571.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp.571-572.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.572.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 572-573.

<sup>11</sup> Syed Qasim Mahmood, *Islami Encyclopedia, Vol. 1* (Lahore: Al-Faisal Publishers, N.D.), P.738.

<sup>12</sup> Khwaja Ebadullah Akhtar, *Mashaheer-e-Islam* (urdu) (Lahore: Idara Saqafat-e-Islamia, 1958), pp. 70-77.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 77-88.

<sup>14</sup> Selection from Government Record, p.572.

<sup>15</sup> Durre S. Ahmed, p.10.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>19</sup> Shaun R. Gregory and Simon R. Valentine.

<sup>20</sup> Selection from Government Record, p.573.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Ifthar H. Malik, *Religious Minorities in Pakistan: Report*, Minority Rights Group International, United Kingdom, September 2002, p.11. & Durre S. Ahmed, p.12.

<sup>22</sup> Zikri (Labaik Ya Imam Mahdi).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



- <sup>24</sup> Durre S. Ahmed, p.12.
- <sup>25</sup> A.W.Hughes, p. 44.
- <sup>26</sup> Selection from Government Record, p.573.
- <sup>27</sup> Durre S. Ahmed, p.12.
- <sup>28</sup> Zikris: Some Information, Gupshup, <<http://www.paklinks.com/g/all-views/169932-zikris-some-info.html>> (accessed on 5 March 2014).
- <sup>29</sup> Durre S. Ahmed, p.12.
- <sup>30</sup> Selection from Government Record, p.573.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.12.
- <sup>33</sup> Shaun R. Gregory and Simon R. Valentine.
- <sup>34</sup> Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series, Baluchistan (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publication, 1984), p.30.
- <sup>35</sup> 30 Days Prayer Net Work, *An Islamic Offshoot – Zikri Baluch*, <<http://www.paklinks.com/g/all-views/169932-zikris-some-info.html>> (accessed on 4 February 2014).
- <sup>36</sup> Dr. Iftikhar H. Malik, p. 12 & Durre S. Ahmed, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>37</sup> Selection from Government Record, pp.573-574.
- <sup>38</sup> Durre S. Ahmed, p.14.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 15.
- <sup>41</sup> Selection from Government Record, p.574.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Shaun R. Gregory and Simon R. Valentine.
- <sup>44</sup> Zikris: Some Information.
- <sup>45</sup> Durre S. Ahmed, p.10.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.11.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.11.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.11.
- <sup>49</sup> Vahe Boyajian-Surenians, “Notes on the Religious Landscape of Iranian Baluchistan: Observations from the Sarhadd Region,” *Iran and The Caucasus*, Research Papers from the Caucasian Centre for Iranian Studies, Yerevan, Volume 8.2, (Brill, Leiden:2004), p.200.
- <sup>50</sup> Shaun R. Gregory and Simon R. Valentine.
- <sup>51</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan Debates, vol. 1, No.3, dated 17 April 1972, p. 355 quoted in Mazhar Hussain, *Religion and Politics of Pakistan: The Role of the Jamiat ul Ulema Pakistan As Rightest Party*, unpublished PhD dissertation, presented to the Department of History & Pakistan Studies, Islamia University, Bahawalpur, 2007-2015, p. 150.
- <sup>52</sup> Factual World, <http://factualworld.com/article/Zikri> (Accessed on 7 March 2014).
- <sup>53</sup> Durre S. Ahmed, p.13.