

Sectarianism in Pakistan and State Response to Counter Sectarianism:

By

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Abstract:

In Indo-Pak Subcontinent the sectarianism can be traced back to 12th century A.D. and sectarian violence was mostly directed against Ismaili Shia community but it was more political than religious. After the foundation of Pakistan, Sectarianism can be divided into three periods. From 1947-77, there was harmony between Sunni and Shia communities, because they faced a common threat of Ahmadis. The second period can be mark as from 1977-88, in which both tried to grab more and more political space and focus was laid over militarization. Islamic Revolution in Iran, Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, Iranian support of Shia community in the region to transport revolution, Rise of Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, Madrassah culture in Balochistan and the Saudi Arabian involvement; militarized and strengthen sectarian violence in Pakistan, which produced security threat for Pakistan.

The government of Pakistan tried to counter sectarianism but there is some loophole in government policies. There is very less cooperation between federal governments and provincial and there are also communication gaps among security agencies and lack the information sharing culture.

The Federal Government of Pakistan must fully implement the already designed policies and also required to come with affective new

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policies. The Provincial Government of Balochistan is required to suggest recommendations for policy making on research and rational basis. The law enforcement agencies are required to enforce the policy approved by Provincial and federal government.

Keywords: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Terrorism, Sectarianism and Law Enforcement Agencies.

Introduction:

The threats of sectarianism exist in region of South Asia prior to the commencement of Pakistan in 1947. Sectarian violence was seen in parts of Indo-Pak subcontinent during Mughal era. As earlier mentioned those during the Safavied rule of Persia Sunni Muslims were forcefully converted to Shiasm, which produced deep grievances among the Sunni Muslims of India. Sectarian violence also breaks in Lucknow in Indo-Pak Subcontinent. However, after the foundation of Pakistan, the Sunni and Shiahs showed harmony of coexistence in Pakistan. While, after Iranian revolution in 1979, Pakistan was once again exposed to the threat of sectarianism violence. It was not just because of the Islamization of Pakistan under the leadership of Genaral Zai ul Haq or the Islamic Revolution of Iran but beside there were many other factors that posed sectarianism threats to Pakistan. these were Sure (Red) revolution in Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq war, United State of Soviet Union (USSR) intervention in Afghanistan, the peak of Capitalist cold war against communism and the emergence of Sunni *Mhjahidden* in Afghanistan (Chubin, 2012).

Although the Sunni felt the danger of sectarianism in Subcontinent but the establishment of Deobandi and Barelvi group helped them to remain tolerant toward others. This produced harmony and tolerance especially in Sunni School of thought which is evident from the fact that they collaborated with Hindus in Indian National Congress also.

However, the emergence of Wahhabism in Arabia also produced impacts on Sunni Muslims of Indo-Pak Subcontinent, as there emerge the Wahabis or Ihl-ul-Adith a Sunni group, like Deobandi and Barelvi. This changed the situation in Subcontinent as the Wahhabism started to get support from Arabia. With this development in Subcontinent lead to direct confrontation among Saudi Arabia and Iran and renewed the Arab-Persian rivalry in Indo-Pak. The Arbo-Persian rivalry deteriorated the situation and Sunni school of thoughts in reaction started to lose the values of tolerance. The Iranian and Saudi Arabian involvement added a new dimension of sectarian problem in Indo-Pak Subcontinent (el-Nawawy, & Elmasry, 2015).

Sectarianism now a day is the prime concern of the state of Pakistan. After the foundation of Pakistan, Sectarianism can be divided into three periods. The first period was 1947-77, in which there was harmony between Sunni and Shia communities. It was because they faced a common threat of Ahmadies. In 1973 Ahmadies were constitutionally declared as non-Muslim, which ended the struggle of Sunni and Shia for a common cause (Fahim, & Cunningham, 2017).

The second period can be mark as from 1977-88, in which both tried to grab more and more political space. Both sects enjoyed the constitutional power for declaring Ahmadis as non-Muslim and in this period both were asserting constitutional pressure upon each other. This era can also be marked with some important events like Islamic Revolution in Iran, Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, Iranian support of Shia community in the region to transport revolution, Rise of Mujahedeen in Afghanistan and Madrassah culture in Balochistan (Khaitous, 2009).

In this period Sunni tried to push constitutionally Shia toward non-Muslim but remain unsuccessful. On the other side Shia were supported by Iran to strengthen bonds with Shia community and different sectarian organs were established. Imamia Student Organization (ISO) was the most important Shia body which sought financial support from Iran. Similarly, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) was established as a reaction by Sunni Ulama in this period. In short this period saw the widening gap between Sunni and Shia and also saw the emergence of sectarian militancy in Pakistan (The Herald, 1996).

The third period can be marked as from 1988 till today. This era saw the intensification of sectarian violence in Pakistan. Different militant organization emerged and remains active for the interests of Saudi Arabia and Iran. The law and order situation even the security of the state was threatened by these sectarian militant groups (Pakistan Security Report, January, 2019).

The Cast of Sectarianism for Balochistan:

Historical the papulation of Balochisan can be praised for religious tolerance as there are many non-Muslims leaving in the province and enjoyed their religious freedom. However, with start of third phase of sectarianism, the social values for religious tolerance were shaken as the Shia-Sunni conflict gets roots in Balochistan during the era of Zai-ul-Haq era.

The religiously tolerant society overthrown its values as a result of infiltration of new religious thoughts after; Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Ira-Iran war, Iranian revolution and the transportation of religious extremist from different part of the world for war in Afghanistan. The Iranian

revolution centralized Shia community in Balochistan and the Sunni thoughts started resistance against the emerging power of the Shia's which was considered in sectarian paradigms of Arabian glances. The impact of Islamization was so deep that the society lost the values of tolerance not only in religious terms but in all aspects of life (Muasher, & Sadjadpour, 2011).

The Islamization of the constitution under Zia was perceived by Shia community as a step for marginalization of Shia in Pakistan. The Shia resisted Zia's policy and for legitimization of its policies and rule Zia backed Sunni especially Wahhabi School of thoughts, whom emerged as a militant religious group under different names like Sipaya-e-Sahaba Pakistan (Khaitous, 2009).

However, the situation was further worsened when Saudi Arabia installed different Madrasas in Balochistan. These Madrasas proved nurseries for sectarian violence in Balochistan. In these environments other external hand gets involved, which utilized these extremists not only against each other but also threatened the security and economy of Balochistan.

The sectarian violence in Balochistan is reported by many organization, each present variance in the intensity of violence. However, the report of South Asian terrorism petrol reported yearly data with accuracy. The reports revealed that just in past 18 years there were 2,565 incidents of sectarianism in Balochistan, in which 7,693 people were killed. These victims included 4,189 civilians, 1,442 Security personals, 498 unspecified and only 1,564 terrorists (Sectarian Violence in Pakistan, 2019). Apart from the loss of human life there are more than 10 thousand people injured in these sectarian attacks.

Beside human resource the sectarian violence in Balochistan also coast economically. Due to deteriorated security situation province lost tourist industry and also loss consumers for the traditional market and products of the province. Because of worse security situation the provincial government has to pay at least 20 percent of its yearly budget for security. The province also lost its attraction for investors, which badly impact the economy of Balochistan. According to Global Peace Index report of 2019, Pakistan was placed at 153rd position out of 163 nations of the world in terms of security and peace. This is not a good sign for the economy of Balochistan as well as of the country. While in ongoing conflict ranking Pakistan was placed at 159 positions, which indicate that the sectarian violence is contributing to the threat of security for the country. While analyzing the trust level of the public due to insecurity and the propagation of intolerance in society Pakistan is ranked as 41st for having trust on

military, which indicate the militarization of the society as well. The report also indicated that violence cast economy in this list Pakistan was placed at 63rd position with an annual economic cost of 79,382.4 million and the economic impact of 123,485.8 million U.S dollars with 7% of Pakistan's GDP (Global Peace Index, 2019).

Apart from these the sectarian violence also cast the province the flight of consumers and talent as till 2010 at least 1, 00,000 people migrated from the province. These migrants include educated class of the society whom were socially responsible for maintaining the level of tolerance in the society.

Balochistan remain a hot spot in term of sectarianism and it is the most affected area of the country in terms of sectarian violence. The fact is evident from the report that in 2018 alone almost 600 people were killed in terrorist attacks in Pakistan while in these 354 were killed in Balochistan alone, which is almost 60% of the total casualties of the country. These 354 includes 91 security forces personal and 237 civilians (Sectarian Violence in Pakistan, 2018).

Regarding Quetta and surroundings LeJ, SSP, TTP, ISIS and Hizbul Ahrara have carried 35 attacks in which 385 people injured and 261 were killed in 2018 alone. Quetta city remain the target area of these militant groups. Only in Quetta 34 % of the total attacks of Balochistan was carried, which caused the life 111 people.

However, these sectarian groups also carried 7 attacks in Qilla Abdulah and four attacks in Mastung the adjoining areas of Quetta. In which 161 people were killed and 200 hundred were injured. Apart from these districts they are involve in Gwader and Qilla Sifullah districts of Balochistan. Out of the total 24 attacks were carried on security forces especially police, four attacks on political leaders and two attacks on Christian community. These attacks also include 6 sectarian attacks which killed 8 people (Sectarian Violence in Pakistan, 2019).

The sectarian attacks are carried by Lashker which repeatedly targeted Hazara community; which is Shia community with special identity in the province. The sectarian violence in Balochistan is mostly carried against Hazar as they can easily be identified because of their distinguished physical features.

State Measures to Tackle Sectarianism:

The Provincial Government with collaboration of Federal Government responded sectarianism in different ways. Some of these responses are elaborated below.

Creation of Religious Harmony:

State of Pakistan responded the sectarianism in different ways. The response of the provincial government is always subjected to the policy of federal government and both federal and provincial governments cooperate and collaborate in such issues of national importance.

The government of Pakistan upon realizing the threat of sectarianism tried to create sectarian harmony in the country. In this connection the federal government tried to formulate a forum which can address the issues of both Sunni and Shia sects. In March 1995, Milli Yekjehti Council (MYC) was formed consisting of eleven religious and sectarian parties' leaders to create sectarian harmony and to do away with the misunderstanding between the *Shi'ahs* and the *Sunnīs*. The council agreed in May 1995 to a 17-point code of conduct. As a result, the situation significantly improved in 1995 and 1996. However, the extremists on both sides were not happy with the agreement, and they blamed their respective leaders for deviating from their beliefs and principles. As a result, the middle of 1996 witnessed a violent increase in sectarian violence proving the failure of MYC (Ali, 2000).

In April 1998 both the SSP's leader, Maulana Zia ul Qasmi and the government proposed framing two draft laws. On April 1, *'Ulama* Committee, presided by Dr. Israr Ahmad was formed in this connection. It was agreed in the meeting that there should be a law on the national level that whoever insults the *Sahāba* (companions of the Prophet PBUH), *Khulfa-e-Rashideen* wives of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) or *Ahl al-Bait*, should be punished strictly. However, Sajid Ali Naqvi, patron in chief of TJP rejected both the laws on the ground that increasing punishment for these offences will lead to chaos in society. SSP also targets the *Brelvī*, a *Sunnī* sect for its 'unIslamic' doctrines, however, *Brelvī* do not agree with SSP doctrines (The Herald, 1996).

Apart from the federal government struggle for the establishment of religious harmony these militant groups were never controlled. The creation of YMC was a great initiative by the federal government of Pakistan but it soon meets to failure because of militant ideology and external involvement. The YMC failure can be blamed upon both SSP factions and ISO factions, whom rejected the agreement under the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Operational Front:

Government of Pakistan started security operations against terrorism especially against sectarianism all over the country. The intensity of the operations remains high in start but from 2018 it remains lower to counter sectarianism in Pakistan. In these operations one of the effective operations

was named as Rad-ul-Fasad. The frequency of Rad-ul-Fasad was also lower in 2018 as compare to 2017. The 2018 saw the deaths of 105 militants in security operations while in 2017 the deaths of terrorists were 524 militants. These operations are also known as investigation based operations (IBOs). It is combine effort of spy agencies with operation agencies of military, police, paramilitary force, IB, CIA, ISI, MI, FBI and other investigation agencies. The IBOs are based on information encroached by the intelligence agencies, upon which security forces conducted combined operations (Khan, February 1995).

In these operation beside IB, the newly established department of Police; Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) also played an important role as in 2018 it detained 431 suspected militants on the basis of information, for which CTD have to conduct 165 combing operations. This detail not includes those combing operation, in which detainees were arrested and were released by finding them innocent. Similarly, 10 major terrorists' targets were dislodged by defusing IEDs planted by terrorists.

Military/Security Operations in Balochistan:

In Balochistan the security agencies focused on sectarian violence and remain more active than other parts of Pakistan. only in 2018 the security forces conducted 31 combing or IBOs while in 2017 the number of such operation were about 80. These operations were not only limited to some districts but it was carried at least in 18 districts of Balocistan. In 2018 alone the security forces conducted 2 operations in Awaran district of Balochistan in which 9 militants were killed and 1 was arrested. In Bolan, Kalat and Dera Bugti, 4 such operations were conducted in which 10 militants were killed (Pakistan Security Report-2018, January, 2019).

Apart from these 9 IBOs were conducted in 2018 in Quetta and surrounding in which 20 militants involved in sectarian violence in Balochistan were killed and other 17 were arrested by security forces.

Security Forces Clashes and Encounters with Militants:

The security forces also faced resistance during operations against militants. In 2017 almost 65 encounters and clashes were reported in which 251 militants were killed and in which 15 security forces personals were also martyred. In 2018 the frequency was lower as only 22 encounters and clashes were reported in which 37 militants were killed and 5 securities personal and 1 civilian also lost their lives. In Balochistan in 2018, only 8 encounters were reported in which 18 militants were killed (Pakistan Security Report-2018, January, 2019).

However, security forces during these clashes also arrested many militants as in 2018 alone 431 militants were arrested in 165 search operations in Pakistan; this data does not include those operations in which

detainees were released upon finding them innocent. In these detainees 134 were members of TTP, 65 linked with unknown sectarian groups, 32 detainees were from ISIS, 32 Lashker-e-Jhangvi militants and 12 from Al-Qaeda (Pakistan Security Report-2018, January, 2019).

Legislative Measures Against Militant Organizations:

The federal government had legislation for the different issues related to militancy and sectarianism. The constitution of Pakistan granted equality for citizens and also protect the religious beliefs and discrimination on the basis of these beliefs. Beside these the constitution of Pakistan through different Articles (9,20 and 21) also negated any militancy on the basis of sectarianism in Pakistan. Apart from Constitution the Federal Government had legislation upon important aspects of religious militancy. Some of these are being discussed below.

Anti-Terrorist Act of 1997:

The parliament of Pakistan passed an act in 1997 to address the issue of terrorism in Pakistan. The act also directed the security and law enforcement agencies for action against the militancy and terrorism. The empower Federal Government to prescribe and ban an organization which the government believe to have connection with terrorism. At the time of introduction of the Anti-Terrorist bill there were 61 militant organizations which were banned soon after the Act was approved. 77 however, 2 other organizations were banned in 2016 under this act (Anti-Terrorist Act, 1997).

Similarly, section 11-part E of ATA directed actions against militancy and banned organization. The Act directed the law enforcement agencies to seal the offices of ban organization, seize the assets of the ban organization, freeze the property and business of organization, ban on issuing passport for the members of a ban organization, freeze the banks accounts of terrorist organizations, ban issuing of arms licenses and cancel the already issued licenses for organization and its members, close all the income sources and accounts of ban organizations, ban on the publication and printing, ban the press release, press conference and public gatherings of banned organization. Beside these the ATA also restricted the movement of a banned organization.

National Counter Terrorism Authority Act-2013:

The preamble of the NACTA acted revealed that country is experiencing extreme threat for its security because of terrorism and it is meant to address the issues of militancy once for all. It was further explained that to stop the menace of militancy a close coordination among the components of government mechanism and planning is required. The Act also empowered the federal government to establish NACTA's Board and Executive authority. The board of governors was required to provide a strategic vision

and also abide to meet during each quarter of a year. According to the Act the executive body was required to insure the implementation of the policy designed by the Board of Governors. The body was also required by the Act to meet once a year to assist the progress and to recommend for planning. The body in 2014 discussed and planned to include the society through propagation of the negative impacts of terrorism in different local languages to get public support for countering terrorism in the country. Although, initial progress can be seen for the start but it was never implemented in true spirit. The Act also abides the Executive Body to conduct research regarding the cause and effects of terrorism in the country but unfortunately the country lack research culture (National Counter Terrorism Authority Act, 2013).

Beside this NACTA was required to conduct research on the basis of data collected from security agencies regarding terrorism, terror funding and other related aspects of terrorism but still NACTA have not established such forum for collecting data. As information collection was aimed to inform the government at the time so that government could make policies but the lack of such mechanism not only questioned the functioning of NACTA but also of the Federal Government of Pakistan.

Conclusion:

The sect formation was absent at the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The demise of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) raised the question of succession which also produced division among Muslims. At that time some of the companions answer the question of succession as the right of the nearest and dearest of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) while some answered that it is the right of the people. In Arabia the succession values were not hereditary but were subjected to the choice of the people. Thus Abu Bakr (RA) was elected as the first caliph of Islam, they were named as Ahl-ul-Baiyt. While the group who believe that caliph of the Prophet (PBUH) must be from his clan favored Hrazrat Ali (RA), they were named as Shiyan-e-Ali.

Although there were no division at this question till the period of Umayyad, but during Umayyad rule Shiyan-e-Ali were badly treated and punished. This widened the gap and during Abbasid rule Shiyan-e-Ali infiltrated in government. The Shiyan-e-Ali became influential at the time of Ai-Mamun and after him they started their rule. The division was further cleared by differences upon interpretation of Islamic laws.

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The government of Pakistan tried to maintain peace by taking different measures. State of. The response of the provincial government is always subjected to the policy of federal government and both federal and provincial governments cooperate and collaborate in such issues of national importance. In this connection the federal government tried to formulate a forum which can address the issues of both Sunni and Shia sects. In March 1995, Milli Yekjehti Council (MYC) was formed consisting of eleven religious and sectarian parties' leaders to create sectarian harmony and to do away with the misunderstanding between the *Shi 'ahs* and the *Sunnīs*. The council agreed in May 1995 to a 17-point code of conduct. As a result, the situation significantly improved in 1995 and 1996. However, the extremists on both sides were not happy with the agreement, and they blamed their respective leaders for deviating from their beliefs and principles. As a result, the middle of 1996 witnessed a violent increase in sectarian violence proving the failure of MYC.

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In short the government of Pakistan tried to counter sectarianism but there is some loophole in government policies. There is very less cooperation between federal governments and provincial and there are also

communication gaps among security agencies and lack the information sharing culture. On the basis of the above following are the recommendations with accordance to the understandings of researcher.

Recommendations:

The sectarianism not only produced violence in the society but it also threatens the security of the state. On the light of the above research and conclusion the researcher suggested some recommendations as given below.

Regularization of Madrassahs:

The Federal Government must insure the regularization of Madrassahs in its domain and concrete legislation is required for its regularization. A mechanism should be established for check and balance of these Madrassah. The Balochistan Government need legislate on the issue of Madrassahs regularization and law should be introduced for regularization and monitoring of Madrassahs. In this connection a religious monitoring and evaluation body must be setup to maintain check and balance. For regularization of Madrassahs the Government must insure the information regarding the administration, funding, students and courses taught in these Madrasahs.

Reformation of Madrassahs Curriculum:

The Government should introduce a curriculum for Madrassahs with uniformity and balancing the beliefs of both sects so that religious students knows the reasons behind the formation of sect. this not only produce uniformity but will also produce culture of reason and rationality on Madrassahs level and will also avoid misconceptions against other sect. resultantly it will help in producing religious Ulama on rational basis, which will lead for religious debates on reasoning basis. Beside these co-curricular activities must be insure in madrassahs to reduce frustration among student and these will be followed by intra-Madrassahs competitions, which will bring student of both Sunni and Shia sects closer to produce religious harmony.

Supreme Ulama Council:

The Government of Balochistan as well the Federal Government are required to establish a council of Ulama for Ijthehad. This forum should be open for all Schools of thoughts to bring Ulama of each School of thought on a platform. This will produce tolerance among different schools of thoughts. It can be utilized as debating forum too, for widening the window of tolerance for the students as well.

The establishment of such forum will also help Government for the introduction of new laws for dispensing of Sects rights and for regularization of sect members and respective Madrassahs of each sect.

Freedom of Expressions:

The right of freedom of expressions should be defended for both Sunni and Shia communities with restriction to not disrespect or damage the beliefs of other school of thought. The schools of thoughts should be granted the right of expression to convince people on rational basis and they must be restricted for imposition of their opinion on others. This will restore the values of tolerance among both Sunni and Shia community and will produce knowledge for each other beliefs and must led to respectful society in terms of religious tolerance.

Prohibiting of Sectarian Organizations:

All the organizations and individuals posing the threat of sectarianism should be ban and these must be sealed or retained with respects laws. Strong action in required against ban organizations and individuals having connections with these organizations. The ban should also include individuals and organizations or groups that provide financial support for these organizations. The assets of these groups, individuals and organization must seize by the government.

The Government should display the names of ban individuals, groups and organization in public and also display the reasons behind that. This will produce trust of the public on Government policies and the society will discourage such sectarian activities.

Beside these the literature of these organizations in all form should be ban and the Khatibs with connection to any sectarian group must not be allow for public speeches. The government should also ban the public gatherings of sectarian organization so that to stop the menace on societal level.

Disarmaments:

The Government must introduce a policy for disarmament of the society and especially the sectarian groups. The Government is required to cancel all the licenses issued to the individuals involved in sectarian activities. Beside this the Government has to impose ban on arms license for public also with a strict security for issuance of arms license. Beside this the government should collect or seize the arms of individuals and groups involve in sectarianism in Balochistan.

Effective Legislation:

The Government on both provincial and Federal level is required to legislate the issue of sectarianism. Balochistan Government must legislate different aspects of religious beliefs of different schools of thoughts and must protect the respect of beliefs without imposition of beliefs of one school of thought on other. Strict actions and strong punishments must be legislated for groups, individuals and organizations involve in sectarianism in Balochistan.

Awareness among Public:

The Government should include those aspects of Islam that address the values of Humanity and religious harmony in the curriculum of both Madrassahs and modern schools. Media and other sources of information must utilize for producing awareness regarding the true spirit of Islam and Islamic values of religious tolerance and humanity.

Mobilization of NGOs:

Different non-Governmental Organizations are working in the province for the welfare of the society; the Government is required to assign tasks to all the NGOs for reducing the threat of sectarianism and also to produce awareness on social level regarding the true spirit of Islam and also the impacts of division among the Muslims on sectarian basis.

Speeding the Government Machinery:

The Federal Government had already set different security components to deal with sectarianism. These include NACTA, ATF, CTD, IB and many other departments, with the direction to counter terrorism and sectarianism in Pakistan. These components are not only working with federal government but also with provincial governments. Government of Balochistan is required to take steps for speeding their action to sustain peace in society. For this reasons the government must come with quick and timely legislation, decisions and policy so that to enhance the capacity of these security components.

Cooperation and Coordination:

The Balochistan Government is required to cooperate with federal government to streamline the actions of security forces against sectarianism. Beside this the anti-sectarian forces are required to coordinate by sharing information and cooperate while taking actions against sectarianism.

Establishment of Data Hub:

The provincial government, federal government and all state organs dealing with sectarianism are required to establish information hub. This information hub will produce and promote coordination and cooperation timely.

Research:

The Government on both provincial and Federal level must encourage academia and researcher to conduct research in the field of sectarianism and religious harmony so that to produce knowledge which can help countering sectarianism in Pakistan.

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