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Curbing the Menace of Sectarianism in Pakistan: A Securitization Model Perspective

ABSTRACT

Islam has been, as much, a force of unity, as of dis-unity. With a multi-faceted ethnically driven society, Pakistan is home to many religions and sects. The basic principles on which the state stands tall; the ideology of Pakistan, is challenged every single time when masses are strangled to death over radicalization and extremism rooted by sectarianism. This article gives an in-depth analysis of religious extremism as an impetus to sectarian violence that has dismantled the social fabric of the state. This paper figures out the dichotomy underpinning correlation of sectarianism with the political identity of the state. Contingent upon the qualitative methodology and primary as well as secondary sources of data collection, the paper intends to shed light upon the internal dynamics and role of external players, adding fuel to fire, in this grave threat to the security of the state. The geo-strategic threats and the polarization of Shia Sunni conflict have taken a massive turn after the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the promotion of Wahabi/Salafist movement by Saudi Arabia as well as the intrusion of hard-line religious groups of Afghanistan in the internal politics of the country. A grave threat imposed on the state and its security through the suicide attacks at mosques and *Imambarghas* targeting either sect has led the country into the pit of sectarian divide. Under the lens of Buzan's notion of security, and the securitization theory, this paper unveils the reasons to securitize the issue of sectarianism. The paper extends to look deep into the correlation of political identity and the rising sectarian violence with the failure of policies to curb sectarian conflicts. Moreover, the reason for the failure to resolve the sectarian divide lies in the role of external factors that have only launched a proxy war in the country. The representation of policies to tackle the violence and extremism caused by the sectarian divide is the core purpose given by the author to determine the internal security threat of the country.

Keywords: *Radicalization, extremism, sectarianism, polarization, proxy war*

AUTHORS

Maryam Khurshid*

Lecturer, School of International Relations, Minhaj University Lahore.

maryamkhurshid.ir@mul.edu.pk

Anas Bin Tariq*

Lecturer, School of International Relations, Minhaj University Lahore:

anas.ir@mul.edu.pk

Mehwish Kiran***

PhD Scholar, Dept. of Islamic Learning, University of Karachi:

kiranmehwish1@gmail.com

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e-mail: editor@al-qudwah.com

***Correspondence Author:**

Anas Bin Tariq* Lecturer, School of International Relations, Minhaj University Lahore.

Introduction

Under the imperial rule of the British in the sub-continent, various schools of thought emerged with distinctive ideologies of *Deobandi*, *Bawrelvi*, *Wahabi*, *Ahl e Hadith*. It is believed that the policy of ‘Divide and Rule’ flourished when the western power could not overcome the spread of Islam. Muslims, finding their way to a newly-born country, were dragged into the evils of sectarianism long before its independence. “Following a policy of divide and rule is their age-old practice and any deviation from such a type of an approach is considered by the people at the helm of affairs as detrimental to their interests” (Ahmar, 2010). Shah (2014) explores that “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. The sectarian division could easily destroy the faith”.

The differences emerged way back to the time after the death of Prophet Muhammad PBUH and various wars were waged amongst Muslims killing each other. The nascent idea of the state of Pakistan found its basis on religious beliefs. “The narrative of ideology of Pakistan succeeded to such an extent that the state became an Islamic State where any villain could occupy power in the name of enforcing Sharia and making people of Pakistan better Muslims” (D. S. K. Warraich, 2018). Dorsey (2018) dwells deep into the roots of extremism that are submerged in the early development of political ideology. He expatiates, “When a state claims a theocratic mission, it is bound to provoke conflicts over whose model shall prevail when religion is pushed explicitly into politics it becomes a currency of power”.

Exploring the history of extremism and sectarianism in Pakistan from the lens of socio-constructivism, it is observed “What needs to be understood is that there can be causes worth dying for, but there cannot be any worth killing for. How many more people will they kill to establish a religious system based on sectarianism? For in the end, with each killing, another soul will be born in every house” (Riffat, 2015). Neither its founders nor the advocates of freedom foresaw the future falling into the sectarian curse and religious extremism. “Since its birth, however, Pakistan has been torn between different interpretations of its Islamic identity” (Javaid, 2011). Quaid e Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, albeit being a Shi’ite Muslim, never revealed his sect. He galvanized the Muslims to be unified in the state of Pakistan by encouraging them to give up ethnic, provincial, sectarian differences and wanted the state to be secular.

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Soon after the death of Jinnah, sectarian radicalization entered politics in the formation of organizations like *Idara e Tahafuz e Haquq e Shia* and *Tanzim-e-Ahle-Sunnat* and the target-killing on the basis of religious beliefs took a massive turn. In the Ayub Khan regime, no serious measures were taken to tackle the gravity of the situation rather the incidents of the Shia massacre emerged by Deobandi Muslims. The period of General Zia Ul Haq and the implementation of Islamization added fuel to fire. Sectarian differences were seen to take a rift under his military rule and the idea of Islamization is said to be stimulated by the Iranian revolution led by Ayatullah Khomeini. The vulnerability of Sunni beliefs of General Zia perceived the revolution as a mere threat. The head of the state, through his policies, entered the realm of extremism via pan-Islamization.

The period gave birth to religious organizations like sectarian violence backed by extremism. In the post 9/11 period, under the regime of General Pervez Musharraf, various Fundamentalist organizations being fed on hate speech, extremism, and sectarian divide were banned. “The violent end of the Lal Masjid rebellion marked a critical watershed in Pakistan’s struggle with Islamic militancy” (DAWN, 2017). It was the deadliest battle with a militant since Musharraf declared his alliance with the United States, and al Qaeda leaders were quick to respond, calling for revenge. It has been observed that religion has always been used as a way of exploitation to achieve political goals, at times. Extremist groups deploy insurgency in the state not only to target the government or other political parties but to weaken the internal functioning of the country.

This grave internal security has been challenged by religious political militia *Ahl e Sunnat Wal Jama’at*, *Sunni Tehreek*, *Tehreek e Jafriya Pakistan*, *Sipah e Mohammad i Pakistan*, *Lashkar e Jhangvi*, etc. General Pervez Musharraf expressed at an interfaith conference in Islamabad, “Religious militias calling themselves Sipahs, Jaishes and Lashkars cannot exist parallel to the army...our army is the only Sipah and Lashkar in Pakistan” (Asia Report, 2005). In 2009, under the government of Asif Ali Zardari, the sectarian violence and genocide seemed to take a massive turn whether it was Kohistan Shia massacre or target killings on Rawalpindi Raja Bazar by Tahreek e Taliban Pakistan. The security threat through sectarianism has been curbed through military operations like *Rah-e-Raast*, *Rah-e-Nijaat*, *Rah-e-Shaahdat*, *Zarb-e-Azab* where core objectives have been to put an end to terrorism and sectarian violence caused by external players. The situation kept on aggravating in the Nawaz Sharif era, where Lashkar e Jhangvi took full responsibility for Hazara massacre targeting Shi’ites. National Action Plan (NAP) was formulated after a heinous attack on Army Public School Peshawar Campus where

terrorists of TTP butchered innocent students claiming to take revenge from the military official's children. Under Imran Khan's governance, as a reaction to France's blasphemous acclaimed to be freedom of speech, Tahreek e Labaik Pakistan turned down the capital territory of Pakistan led by extremist leader Khadim Rizvi (late), and yet again exploited religion to achieve political motives. Moreover, Afghan Taliban and Lashkar e Jhangvi have been targeting Shias in Hazara with atrocious motives of disintegrating the nation.

“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” (Shah, 2014). General Zia ul Haq pan-Islamization and promulgation of Zakat and Ushr Ordinance, was a reaction to Iranian revolution where the proponents of Ahl e Hadith and Deobandi were funded by Saudi Arabia with the puritanical implementation of religion, “how well-organized JI was, and how much ‘black money’ it received both in contributions collected by volunteer mullahs ‘door to door’ and from foreign countries, primarily Saudi Arabia” (Wolpert, 1993). The purpose remained obvious; to instill the Wahabi school of thought and drag Pakistan as a surrogate in the Saudi-Iran dichotomy of Islamic doctrine. The Zia's military leadership failed to remain unbiased who provided proper grounds to Saudi Arabia.

Highly influential Shi'ites were assassinated and his biasedness rose to such an extent that Maulana Madoudi's translation of The Quran became a part of academia in the military by General Zia. Bhutto sensed the seeds of sectarianism being cultivated through his military power, and he predicted the highly injurious influence on the religious biases. He confronted the general to which Zia wrote, “My dear Prime Minister, Islam is not the private property of an individual” (Wolpert, 1993), and went on circulating the restricted memo to all units on Army that depicted his Salafist theology being imposed on the young officers and the feeling of animosity, hatred and intolerance being developed in the hearts of Muslims on the basis of sects. “His Islamization policies encouraged and promoted all types of movements but the conservative Deobandis, Ahle Hadith and Jamat-I Islami were the main beneficiaries” (Ibid). Pakistan's drift into extremism; Allah, the Army and America's War On Terror observes the impacts of Zia's Islamization analysing that this could accentuate the sectarian divide rising the seeds of intolerance and atrocities within masses. “When Zia had decided on the Islamization of Pakistan, the unspoken and unappreciated assumption was that the entire population would conform to an official version of Islam, where many schools of Islamic thought had flourished with tolerable accommodation through the ages. Emphasis on religious conformity was therefore to be a baleful novelty to be enforced by religious zeal, only to be opposed by the

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same zeal by those whose persuasions were different.” (Abbas, 2005). The mutual sects and religious beliefs have made extremist organizations like Jaish ul Adl spread cross-border atrocities.

The militants have been supporting Sunni Muslims and ethnic Baloch in the province of Sestan Baluchistan. Such brutalities have become the bone of contention between the neighboring countries that have ultimately aggravated sectarian dispute. Likewise, insurgency caused by Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) has been accused of having connections and backing from Lashkar e Jhangwi (LeJ). Dr Ayesha Siddiqa writes that whatever the ultimate aim of Al-Qaida, TTP, Jundullah, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangavi, Harkat-ul-Jihad-alIslami (HUJI), JeM, JeD, ASWJ, etc., have common objectives and are on the same page in naming all other sects as infidels. They have the same ideology and channels. The complicated nexus and relation between the separatist as well sectarian groups, massive killing on the security forces as well as Shi'its of Hazara are epitome of the external masterminds with a sole motive to destabilize the country.

Not just in Baluchistan province, the sectarian violence has been expanded to every nook and corner of the country and the root cause remains constant; the government's succumbing pressure to implement the true picture of an Islamic Republic of Pakistan, that has sown the seeds of intolerance and antipathy amongst Sunni and Shia sects. “This ‘good us’ and ‘evil them’ mental state paves the way for adopting extremist belief system that legitimize violence for religio-political goals and eventually leads to terrorism” (D. S. K. Warraich, 2018).

Barry Buzan has widened the notion of security entailing the five sectors in which the security issue is perceived a threat to the core values; military, political, social, economic, and environmental. “Security is the pursuit of freedom from threats” (Buzan, 1991). One of the proponents of The Copenhagen School, Buzan opines the securitization model through which issues of highest concern must be dealt under high-politics. “Security is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics” (Buzan et al., 1998). Despite Pakistan securitizing the issue of terrorism by launching operations and allocating Frontier Corps of Pakistan Military at the hub of terrorists' activities, Pakistan still faces the dire consequences and everlasting effects of terrorism instilled by sectarianism, whether in Sestan-Bluchistan or Hazara division. The political ideology of the state has remained in contradiction, and religion has always been considered as a tool to achieve clandestine motives.

Critical Analysis

The sectarian divide in Pakistan has long been embedded in the religion of Islam, but the extremism and violence exacerbated via such homicide are fueled by external factors. It is high time for Pakistan to question the relations of brotherly countries and the role they are playing to threaten the sanctity of the land of the pure. Iran and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have been exasperating the religious binaries and through religious seminaries rather acting as wolves in the sheep's clothing. Without an iota of doubt, the economic ties of Pakistan with Saudi Arabia and Iran have been commendable and the governance of Pakistan has remained neutral between Iran/Saudi conflicts. During the Soviet invasion in Afghan, the *Mujahideens* also acclaimed to be the freedom fighters were schooled under *madrassahs*, funded by Saudi Arabia instilling the orthodox Wahabi sect. “The jihad in Afghanistan during 1980s 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, 1998).

The same strategy was implemented on the Pakistanis where there were 244 *madrassahs* in 1957, whereas till date the number has increased to 24,000. “Besides, encouraging and promoting the Wahabi ideologies, these madrassas served three other purposes. First of them is “channelizing recruits for Jihad” and the other is “breeding hatred against the West” while the last one is advocating an Islamic revolution not only in Muslim countries but also across the globe” (S. K. Warraich, 2018). Extremism in sectarianism is viewed to be masterminded by such external foreign actors that are solely responsible in instigating the indifference and intolerance in theology. The sectarian groups in Pakistan are being heavily funded by the Middle Eastern Islamic States. In the proxy war of Shia'ism and Wahabism, the scuffle to maintain and spread respective religious school of thoughts has been rampant in Pakistan as a host country in the international sectarian conflict. Likewise, various Shia organizations being operational in Pakistan have been sponsored by Iran militia. The way multiple Sunni groups fought against Soviets as Mujahids in Afghanistan, many Shia groups as Imamia Students Organization supported Iran against Iraq. Though these elements have now gained ground in the local societies, their routes still lie in the brotherly countries.

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The policies crafted up till now to fight the extremism caused through sectarianism has failed when it comes to implementation. The Pakistani military through a number of operations against Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan have put a commendable effort to secure the state from heinous motives of terrorists. To nip the evil in the bud, strong measures have to be taken in order to curb the sectarian violence that has directly challenged the internal security of Pakistan. Following are the policy recommendations put forward by the author to scrutinize the grave issue.

Mainstreaming the Madrassahs and National effort to counter Sectarianism

First and the foremost policy that should be implemented is that the federal as well as provincial government must acknowledge the external factors that are adding fuel to the vicious cycle of sectarianism. The seeds of hatred, and intolerance are sown through the literature that is being taught at the madrassas in Pakistan. Although such religious seminaries have been registered, funding and sponsorship have to be deeply analyzed. It should be publicly stated in the National Security Policy of Pakistan that any organization or group spreading hate speech, or bigotry against any ethnicity, race and sect will be held accountable and strict measures must be taken if defying the rule of law.

The state must counter the curriculum, funds and especially the religious scholars who are shaping and brainwashing the young minds. The academia must scrutinize and deeply analyze the syllabi of the madrassas making sure that the literature being written and taught be unbiased and free of hate speech. The funding of madrassas will be countered by the Intelligence Agencies of the state and serious measures be taken on the intervention of external factors in the operation of such organizations. Moreover, the madrassas that have been banned once should not be allowed to be operational with a different name. The

The Single National Curriculum that has been designed by Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) government should bring Madrassahs on board as well so the unified syllabi is taught nationwide.

Maintaining Defense and Territorial Integrity to counter cross-border intrusion

The border fencing with neighboring countries is a vital step undertaken by the government of Pakistan. The cross-border intrusion of the extremists lead to spreading violence where sectarianism is deeply rooted in especially the north and south-western region of Pakistan. The border-fencing should be accelerated to ensure the defense and territorial integrity. Cross border facilitation of non-state actors to cause insurgency in the country will be managed through border fencing. Pakistan Army must continue carrying out operations against militants and insurgents especially in the Kurram and Orakzai agency to refrain TTP and any other anti-Shia militancy.

The National Army should induct Parachinaris in the paramilitary force so they could contribute in safeguarding the security of the region. Alternative routes can be maintained by the provincial government for Parachinaris towards Peshawar via Khyber Agency so they can travel without any fear.

Securitize the Issue of Sectarianism

The security of any state directly depends upon its economy. More the state is economically strong, the more secure it is. Pakistan relations with neighboring countries can only be strengthened, if the financial debts are cleared. This, eventually, will maintain a reputable position of Pakistan in the International community. Defense budget of Pakistan is already minimal which should be increased so that its military could reach the level of advanced technology. Undoubtedly, Pakistan's Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) have fought day and night to eradicate the menace of terrorism from society. However, the extravagantly polarized political environment failed to come up with a cogent anti-terrorism policy that would have been implemented in letter and spirit. The APS Attack sent ripples in Pakistan and jolted the political establishment to take substantial action against these groups; hence, they came up with the National Action Plan 2014. Moving on, Pakistan has now devised a National Internal Security Policy (NISP) that claims to be the first ever Comprehensive National Security Policy of Pakistan. The public version of this document has become the center of attention and has sparked a debate worldwide. In this policy brief, the authors would discuss the issues in the policy of Pakistan on 'Terrorism' articulated under the Section VI of the NSP ,i.e. Internal Security. This policy is more like the extension of an old policy 'National Internal Security Policy' that was formulated in 2014 for 5 years and later on extended in 2018

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until 2023 . It would have been more apt if the aforementioned policy was mentioned in the NSP. However, no plea is in sight to implement the old policy. There should have been a proper plan of action to identify the lacunae that hampered the implementation of previous policy. Despite all the policies that have been crafted up till now, the security threat has remained. Hence, there is a need to securitize the issue of radicalization and terrorism instigated due to sectarian differences.

Education as a Gateway to Resolve Extremism and Sectarian Divide

The education sector should work on the under-developed regions of Pakistan especially in North-Waziristan and Baluchistan with the provision of advanced schools and universities. The graduates of Madrassahs are not recognized to seek admission in the government universities of Pakistan. The lack of proper education and unemployment lead them to join such extremist's groups. The education till the matriculation can be provided free of cost, like other developed countries. Parents who fail to bear the expenses of the school fee approach madrassas for the education of their children. In addition to that, the Imams of the mosques must have recognized degrees so the young generation can be in safe hands when it comes to theology. "Because of these atrocities of killing in God's name, look at the plight of Islam now; whereas, there is a focus on eliminating people of other sects by blowing themselves up in the mosques and expecting to land in the heaven. How much pathetic can one's thinking be? And in the process, the real issues like the need for education and learning, as laid down in the Quran and the Hadith, seem to have been forgotten" (Zafar, 2013).

Securitize the Issue of Sectarianism

Applying the Copenhagen School and notion of security propounded by Buzan, the state should deal with the issue of sectarianism under high-politics. The gravity of the situation demands that sectarian conflicts must be securitized through military operations as they have been done previously. The terrorism instilled through sectarian conflicts directly targets the social fabric of the state which must be dealt under the realm of 'above-politics'. The successful securitization relies on the audience's acceptance and it is high time when the policymakers need to speak out in the favor of lives lost to this menace. Instead of dwelling deep into the provincialism and the sectarian divide, the lawmakers of the state must leave their religious and ethnic biases aside and consider it to be the 'existential threat' to Pakistani society. People victimized in the name of religion have no sense of security whether political, social, or economical. Operations against militant groups by the armed forces of Pakistan have been successful in securitizing the issue.

Conclusion

There must be strict investigation in the matters of blasphemy where innocent individuals are held accountable for the crime they haven't committed. Religion, being used as a tool of exploitation should be stopped through enforcement of laws. Any political party that instigates the fellow Muslims on sectarianism or spreads hate speech must be banned and disqualified to participate in general elections. The use of loudspeakers must be restricted to the call of prayer and restrained to be used for any other means. The National Action Plan (NAP) was never implemented in true sense, which can resolve the internal and external threats to security.

The research finds a correlation between the ideology of the state and the rising issues based upon sectarianism. The republican state of Pakistan where sovereignty lies in Allah, has not fully comprehended basic underpinnings of, Islam, which itself promotes the right to live for all religions rather condemning the division in religion. The already divided Islam has only been used as a mere tool to achieve political motives whether by internal or external players. The state needs to remain secular as the founder envisioned. Whether it is the notion of Pan-Islamization by Zia or madrasah-funding by neighboring countries, the state needs to understand the security threats where it has become a victim of its own propaganda.

It is because of terrorism instilled by sectarian polarization that Islam has been looked down upon as the religion and Muslims are targeted all around the world as terrorists. The religion itself has remained a force of disunity and paradoxical to the state ideology. The research paper has deeply analyzed the causes of sectarian conflict in Pakistan. The external factors as the root cause of such a sensitive issue can be tackled with better governance and especially by securitizing the issue of sectarianism. The policies recommended by the author underlines the ways in which the radicalization and the polarization of the Sunni Shia discord can be bridged.

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