

Sectarianism in pakistan

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



Sectarianism in Pakistan INTRODUCTION The decade of the 1990s witnessed a frightening upsurge in the Shia-Sunni sectarian violence in Pakistan, both in terms of scope and intensity. Recently, sectarian strife has engulfed even those areas, which were previously unaffected, largely because of the emergence of organized terrorist groups along sectarian lines. Besides target killings, these groups hit even ordinary members of each other's sects. The problem, therefore, is no more of an occasional nature, or limited to isolated localities.

Rather, it has now become a national concern with serious implications for the state and society. The paper argues that though the Shia-Sunni conflict is not new to Pakistan or even to the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent, the ongoing phase is distinct in several ways: · Firstly, the level and intensity of violence is high because of easy access to weapons and training facilities in Afghanistan. · Secondly, certain Islamic states such as Iran and Saudi Arabia sponsor the activities of sectarian groups. This adds a regional dimension to the domestic sectarian conflict. Thirdly, the social base of the sectarian conflict has significantly expanded because of factors including: a) Use of print media, school textbooks, religious literature, posters and banners; b) Accessibility to means of electronic communication; c) Better transport services which increase mobility of sectarian activists. To argue thus this paper is divided into following three sections: 1) Sectarian Violence and its origins; 2) Causes of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan; and 3) Failure of State.

SECTARIAN VIOLENCE AND ITS ORIGINS This section discusses the history of sectarian violence.

Sectarian violence and religious extremism is an unpredictable menace. History is replete with incidents of such sorts in various countries. The bigots and the evil minded selfish natured people are behind this abhorrent act relating to the security concerns of many nations. Unfortunate is the fact that usually the third world Muslim countries have been and are being constantly threatened by these evil acts. Sectarian Violence in Muslim History: Since the very beginning, the Shia-Sunni sectarian conflict has been one of the major characteristics of Muslim history.

Different factions in the respective Muslim societies have also closely interlinked it to the struggle for the acquisition of political power. Syed Amir Ali remarks: " Alas! That the religion of humanity and universal brotherhood should not have escaped the internecine strife and discord; that the faith which was to bring peace and rest to the distracted world should itself be torn to pieces by angry passions and the lust of power. " 1 At the centre of sectarian strife has been the Shia-Sunni conflict.

Immediately after the passing away of the Prophet of Islam, a division emerged on the question of succession. " A small group believed that such a function must remain in the family of the Prophet and backed ' Ali', whom they believed to have been designated for this role by appointment and testament. They became known as his ' partisans' (shia) while the majority agreed on Abu Bakr on the assumption that the Prophet left no instruction on this matter; they gained the name ' The People of Prophetic Tradition and consensus of opinion' (ahl al-sunnah wa'l-jama' ah). "

Besides the political dimension, there also existed a difference of opinion about the merits and functions of the successor to the Prophet. " Sunni Islam

considered the Khalifah to be a guardian of the Sharia' h in the community, while Shi' ism saw in the ' successor' a spiritual function connected with the esoteric interpretation of the revelation and the inheritance to the Prophet's esoteric teachings. " In contrast to the Sunnis, the institution of Imamate is fundamental to the Shia Islam. " The Imam, 1 Syed Amir Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, 1976), p100. Besides being a descendant of the Prophet, must possess certain qualities—he must be Ma' sum or sinless, bear the purest and most unsullied character, and must be distinguished above all other men for truth and purity. " Whereas, the Sunnis believe that the " Imamate is not restricted to the family of Mohammad. The Imam need not be just, virtuous, or irreproachable (Ma ' sum) in his life, nor need he be the most excellent or eminent being of his time; so long as he is free, adult, sane, and possessed of the capacity to attend to the ordinary affairs of State, he is qualified for election. 2 Later, both the Shia and Sunni schools further split into several sub-sects on different issues related to succession, interpretation of scriptures and political theory of Islam. Sectarian conflict in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent: Fearing persecution by Ummayyeds and later Abbasides, some of the Shias had moved to the distant parts of the Muslim Empire. Sizeable Shia communities had been established in Punjab and Sindh after their conquest by Muhammad bin Qasim.

Under the early Abbasides, the governor of Jhang, Umar bin Hafas, was a clandestine supporter of Fatimid's movement and it was under him that the Batinya influence spread into the areas between Shorkot and Sindh. Later, one of the Shia branch, the Karamata, was able to set up its independent dynasty in Multan. The Karamata had established contacts with the

Fatimides in Egypt and continued to rule Multan and 2 Syed Amir Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, 1976), p103. surrounding areas, which included parts of Jhang, until Mahmud Ghaznavi defeated and destroyed their "heretical" dynasty. With this, the Karamata movement was wiped out in the Indo-Pakistan context, as it could not survive the loss of political power. However, it left a deep religious imprint on the local population. This is one of the reasons why even today southern Punjab inhabits a sizeable Shia population. In southern India, the Bahmani and Adil Shahi dynasties which ruled for quite some time and acted as a bulwark against Marhattas, professed Shia doctrines.

These dynasties were brought under the control of Mughals under Aurangzeb (d. 1707), which opened the way for the rise of Marhattas. Aurangzeb was allegedly hostile to the Shia dynasties, largely because he considered them heretical. As the Shia dynasties were receiving support from the Safavides of Iran, who were hostile to the Mughals, he had made an offer of alliance to Bukhara. The weakening and disintegration of the Mughal Empire, after the death of Aurangzeb Alamgir, paved the way for a qualitatively different era in the Muslim history of the Sub-continent.

The new era witnessed, on one hand, the onslaught of the British with both colonial and western agenda and, on the other, the rise of Marhattas and Sikhs. Meanwhile, the early successors of Aurangzeb had come under the influence of their Shia courtiers, the Sayyids of Barha. It was in response to these developments that Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) started his reform movement to reassert Islam. Another was the Wahabi movement of

Muhammad Ibn ' Abd al Wahhab (1703-1787), which started in Saudi Arabia, but had a great impact on the religious scene of India.

Both these movements played a major role in the making of today's religio-political scene of India and Pakistan. The Wahabi movement emphasised essentials, preached reverting back to the original sources of Quran and Sunnah, and rejected many of the innovations and cultural adaptations made over centuries in the Indian context. It was vehemently opposed to the Sufi tradition and other divergent schools of thought such as Shia' ism. Essentially, this movement was exclusionist, and far less tolerant and accommodative of divergence, heterogeneity and variations in religious matters.

It lambasted the corruption and laxity of the Muslims' attitudes and rejected the accommodations and cultural richness of the medieval empire. Its sole emphasis was on the classical law, which, in the view of its champions, was the sum and substance of the faith. It was, despite the fact that many leaders of the jihad movement were not blind followers of Muhammad Ibn, ' Abd al Wahhab to warrant the term " Wahabi" for them. Given their extremist credentials, however, the term was widely accepted and is still used in Pakistan³ for the people with similar puritan views.

They are also called Ahl-i-Hadith. Shah Wali Ullah, however, started the most significant reform movement, in the 18th century. Like Wahabis, Shah Waliullah strongly condemned the corrupted Sufi customs and practices, but he was a Hanafi and his version of purified Islam was not completely rejectionist. He himself was a Sufi. He tried to postulate an interpretation of Islam that would coalesce into a purified Sufism with a purified Sunnah. The

Shah Wali Ullah's movement later crystallized into the Deoband movement, founded by 3

Qeyamuddin Ahmed, *The Wahabi Movement in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), p203. Maulana Qasim Nanotawi, in the then United Provinces of British India in 1867. In 1857, Maulana Nanotawi had actively taken part in the rebellion against the British. Through the Deoband movement, however, he and his colleagues sought to achieve their goal through peaceful resistance. The goal, under the circumstances, was nothing but cultural and religious freedom and political independence. In the following years, the Deoband movement adopted the attitude of peaceful resistance and non-cooperation towards the British.

They refused to learn the English language and modern knowledge, and emphasised Arabic and teachings of Islamic classics. In religious terms, the Deoband movement continued to largely profess Shah Waliullah's teachings with puritan emphasis. Originally, the Deoband School had a policy of non-involvement into sectarian controversies, but later, especially under Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, the Hanafis became divided into rival groups. Among others, it was because Maulana Gangohi had condemned " the annual gatherings at the tombs of saints as well as the prevalent rites of fatihah and milad".

These differences were a manifestation of dissatisfaction of the Deoband School with the things as they existed and its determination to improve them. The puritan emphasis of Wahabis and Deobandis generated tensions among Muslims. The followers of Sufi Islam did not accept the puritan emphasis which, in their view, amounted to renunciation of mystic

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conception of Islam. It was, however, Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan (1856-1921) who founded the Brelvi School⁴ by setting up a 4 Usha Sanyal, Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and His Movement, 1870-1920 (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996), p44. adrasa at Breli in the United Provinces. Unlike the puritans, the Brelvi school expressed and sustained " the social and religious customs of a decadent people: the civilization, or lack of it, into which India fell after the feudal Mughal culture had succumbed and before a new culture arose under the imperial British penetration. " Meanwhile, Lucknow had become the centre of Shia activism. The confrontation between these schools later spread to the whole of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent. In particular, it resulted in increased incidents of Shia-Sunni violence.

Later, however, the emergence of Amada movement, whose founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, claimed to be the prophet, prompted a unified reaction from all of the above mentioned schools. The Ahmadis, who are also called as Qadianis and Mirzais, were declared non-Muslims by all of the above groups. This declaration was formulated on the basis that they do not believe in the finality of the prophet hood of Muhammad. This controversy overshadowed the differences among the rest of the sectarian groups for decades until they were formally declared non-Muslims through a Constitutional Amendment in Pakistan in 1974.

The nature of Shia-Sunni violence under the British was radically different than it had been under the earlier Muslim empires or caliphates. Previously, it was always a conflict either between the established Sunni authorities and anti-status quo Shia denominations or between the Sunni and Shia dynasties

or caliphates. Under the alien rule of the British, the conflict declined to the communities' level, involving the general public and theologians alike in sectarian violence.

The role of the government was limited to that of arbiter, enforcer of law or manipulator, if so required, in the larger colonial interests. However, the state was secular and largely unrepresentative and, therefore, the use of sectarian idiom was limited to the purpose of selfidentification. The problem of sectarian conflict in the post-independence years can be analyzed both in terms of the continuation of old historical pattern with certain new characteristics and, as a direct consequence of crises of identity and governance in Pakistan.

It may be noted that the political discourse at macro level has revolved around the issues of Islamization vs. modernization, centralization vs. provincial autonomy, and democracy vs. authoritarianism in Pakistan since independence. The persistent ambivalence towards these issues has led the Pakistani State into a crisis of identity, causing frustration among almost all the sections of society including modernists, Islamists and various ethnic communities.

The frustration has become further intensified in view of the failure of successive governments on the performance front, especially in terms of giving due representation to the marginalized sections of society in the top state institutions. Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan: There are numerous sectarian divisions in Pakistan. One source puts the total number of Muslim sects and sub sects at 72. 5 The Sunni population subdivides into four major streams-Deobandis, Barelvis, Ahl-e Hadith and Wahabis-and within these

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there are 5 Sectarian Division of Muslims” (Bureau Report), The Times, London, 28 Sept. 1998. reportedly dozens of subgroups⁶. Despite these divisions, the majority of Sunnis in Pakistan follow the Hanafi School of Islamic jurisprudence⁷ The Sunni population is estimated to be 74 per cent of Pakistan's population. The three Shia streams in Pakistan are the Ismailis, the Ithna Ashariyya and the Bohras. ⁸ Estimates of the size of the Shia population vary widely, from a low of 5 per cent to a high of 25 percent; most sources put it at 15-20 per cent. During the Pakistan movement, the essentially secular leaders of the Muslim League had used the idiom of ‘ Muslim identity’ to mobilize masses and to justify a separate homeland for them. Interestingly, almost all the major religious parties of that time had opposed the demand of Pakistan either on the grounds that the concept of separate nationhood was not tenable from the perspective of Islam, or that the secular leadership of Muslim League could not be trusted to sincerely fulfill the promise of the creation of an Islamic state.

Nonetheless, the Muslim League succeeded in creating Pakistan, despite the opposition of religious parties. As a result, the Islamic identity of the migrant communities, which settled mostly in the urban areas of Punjab and Sindh, was reinforced and they began to act as the major vehicle for the Islamization campaign in Pakistan. It was, in contrast to other ethnic groups such as Sindhis, Baluchis and Pakhtuns who, while de-emphasizing the ideological debate, championed the cause of decentralization and provincial autonomy. ^{6 7} The Sub-Sects of Muslims” (Report), The Economist, London, 28 Jan 1995. Daniel Pipes, Islam and Islamic Groups (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992), p184. ⁸ Ibid. p185. ⁹ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “ Sectarianism in

Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shi' i and Sunni Identities", Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 32, No. 3, July 1998. Gradually, groups emerged out of the existing religious parties, which started emphasizing the sectarian differences with the professed aim of persuading the state to accept their particular views into legislation and its policies.

In the following years, Punjab was to become the major victim of sectarian violence. Today sectarian violence has become widespread, particularly between Shi'a and Sunni militants in areas bordering Afghanistan, while dozens of tribal elders were murdered by militants in Waziristan. CAUSES OF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN This section discusses the main reasons which led to sectarian violence in Pakistan. Pakistan, one of the largest Muslim countries the world, has seen serious Shia-Sunni sectarian violence. Almost 70% of Pakistan's Muslim population is Sunni, and another 30% are Shia.

However, but this Shia minority forms the second largest Shia population of any country, 10 larger than the Shia majority in Iraq. In the last two decades, as many as 4, 000 people are estimated to have died in sectarian fighting in Pakistan, 300 in 2006. 11 Amongst the culprits blamed for the killing are Al Qaeda working " with local sectarian groups" to kill what they perceive as Shi'a apostates, and " foreign powers ... trying to sow discord. " 12 10 Vali Nasr, The Shia Revival (Newyork: Norton, 2006), p160. " Shiite-Sunni conflict rises in Pakistan," by David Montero, February 02, 2007. 11 12 Shiite-Sunni conflict rises in Pakistan," by David Montero, February 02, 2007. Since 2004, there has been intense violence in the FATA. What started in South Waziristan, slowly spread to North Waziristan in 2005 and then later to

Bajaur and Mohamand Agency during 2006 and 2007. For the last two years, this violence has spread to the settled districts of the Khyber Pakhtoonkhawa including Bannu, DI Khan, Peshawar and Swat. Led by the Taliban and its local supporters in the FATA and Khyber Pakhtoonkhawa , this violence is posing a serious threat to the process of governance, challenging the writ of the State.

Referred to by media as Talibanization, these developments has been the subject of intense academic, media and policy interest. Many factors contributed to the growth of sectarian violence since the 1980s and 90s. While some were direct causes, others indirectly deepened the sectarian fault lines. Some of them are: Sectarian Politics: The following factors increased the sectarian divide, which was embedded in Pakistani society in the 1980s, especially in Punjab. First, the formation of Shia and Sunni militant organizations which were not representative of their respective communities although there was support from them.

The formation of the militant Sunni Sipah-i-Sahaba, Pakistan (SSP) and the Shia Sipah-i-Mohammad, Pakistan (SMP) was the main factor underlying the escalating conflict between the two communities. Apart from the Sipah-i-Sahaba, other Sunni organizations like Sunni Tehrik were formed in Sindh. Later some SSP activists led by Riaz Basra organized the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ), named after the founder of the SSP. The LJ was more militant and has been banned. These organizations widened the sectarian divide and both groups started using violence against each other. The strength of these militant sectarian organizations increased in the 1980s and 90s, and they were only banned by General Musharraf in January 2002. Second,

factionalism within the religious parties and militant organizations deepened the sectarian divide. The Jamiat-ul-Islam (JUI) got divided into two factions led by Fazl-ur-Rahman and Sami-ul-Haq and both factions attempted to build their foundations on anti-Shia tenets with each trying to be more virulently anti-Shia. Even the militant organizations on both sides (the SSP and the SMP) faced divisions, and these factions, devoid of effective leadership, were involved in arbitrary killings of the other community.

Religious parties like the JUI provided indirect support to militant organizations. It is essential to understand that sectarian violence is largely limited to Punjab, especially in the district of Jhang, where the mainstream religious parties never enjoyed popular support. Baluchistan had been free of sectarian violence and so was Sind, except for Karachi. The Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan (JUP), which enjoys support at the popular level in Punjab belongs to the Brelvi faith and does not share the antagonism of the Deobandis and Wahabis towards the Shias.

In fact, unlike the latter two, the JUP considers them to be Muslims and a part of the Islamic world. Third, sectarian violence in Punjab was primarily due to Shia-Sunni economic, social and political relations. For example in Jhang, where sectarian violence is high, the Shia community forms the upper class, being landlords and enjoying political power; the majority Sunni community forms the lower stratum in the social, economic and political hierarchy. When the Sunni middle class grew, especially in the 1970s as a result of better education and remittances from the Gulf, they demanded their share of social and political status, which was resisted by the Shias. Maulana Nawaz Jhangvi, assassinated in 1990 by Shia militants, formed the Sipah-i-Sahaba in

Jhang in 1985, largely to fight the Shia landlords. Anti-Shia groups: Anti-Shia groups in Pakistan include the Lashkar i Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, offshoots of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI). The groups demand the expulsion of all Shias from Pakistan and have killed hundreds of Pakistani Shias between 1996 and 1999. 13 As in Iraq they "targeted Shia in their holy places and mosques, especially during times of communal prayer." 14

From January to May 1997, Sunni terror groups assassinated 75 Shia community leaders "in a systematic attempt to remove Shias from positions of authority." 15 Lashkar i Jhangvi has declared Shia to be "American agents" and the "near enemy" in global jihad. 16 Islamization policies of Zia: Islamic policies introduced by Zia-ul-Haq were also responsible for the growth of sectarian violence inside Pakistan. An in-depth analysis would reveal that these policies were cosmetic and peripheral, as they did not impinge 13 Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, oil and the new great game in central Asia* (London: Tauris, 2000), p194. 14

Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival* (New York: Norton, 2006), p166. Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival* (New York: Norton, 2006), p167. Ibid. p168. 15 16 on the bureaucratic military oligarchy or the feudal structure of the society. In fact, these policies were aimed at gaining legitimacy within Pakistan and were not meant to challenge the existing social and economic institutions. However, the Islamization policies exerted a negative influence on the two communities. The Sunni religious parties led by JUI and JUP became active vis-a-vis the Shias, as they wanted the State to introduce the Sunnization of Pakistan, which the Shias feared.

This made the Shias defensive and they started supporting the PPP. In July 1980, 25, 000 Shia protested the Islamization laws in the capital Islamabad. Besides, the changes made by Zia led to intense competition amongst the various Sunni groups, especially the Wahabis, Deobandis and Brelvis, as they wanted the State to enforce their own version of Islam, especially the Islamic laws, though they were united in their opposition to Shias. However, the Islamic reforms introduced by Zia, especially relating to the legal field, alarmed the Shia community.

The Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Fiqh-i-Jafriya (TNFJ) was formed in 1979 to enforce the Jafri fiqh; earlier in the same year Zia had declared that the Hanafi fiqh would be enforced. The formation of TNFJ was the political response of the Shia community. In its early years it fought to get concessions such as exempting the Shia community from paying zakat and ushr. Jihad in Afghanistan: Pakistan's Afghan policy in the 1980s and 90s aggravated sectarian violence inside the country. Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union in the 1980s resulted in the proliferation and easy availability of small arms in Pakistan. 7 The emergence of and subsequent growth of the Taliban in the 1990s and 17 Michael Klare, "Redefining Security: The New Global Schisms", Current History, Vol. 95, No. 604, 1996, p161. their support to Sunni organizations such as the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen impinged directly on sectarian violence. The Sipah-i-Sahaba cadres were trained in Afghanistan and most of them fought the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Shias inside Pakistan. Iran-Iraq War: The impact of the emergence of the Khomeini regime in 1979 in Iran and the subsequent Iran-Iraq war in the early 1980s on sectarian violence in Pakistan has generally been underestimated.

It is no coincidence that the TNFJ, the main Shiite party in Pakistan, was formed in 1979. When the Iran-Iraq war started, the Muslim world got divided into two camps and started funding their faith. As a result, enormous funds flowed, especially from Saudi Arabia and Iran, into Pakistan to support the various Sunni and Shia organizations and the madrasas run by them respectively, which were directly responsible for the growth of organized opposition and violence. Iranian Funding: Exacerbating tensions is Iranian funding of Shia extremists in Pakistan, who not only exact revenge against Sunnis, but have also been used to violently oppress Iranian dissidents in the country who are critical of the Iranian regime. Shia formed student associations and a Shia party with the fundings from Iran, Sunni began to form sectarian militias recruited from Deobandi and Ahl-i Hadith madrasas. Preaching against the Shia in Pakistan was radical cleric Israr Ahmed. Muhammad Manzour Numani, a senior Indian cleric with close ties to Saudi Arabia published a book entitled "Iranian Revolution: Imam Khomeini and Shiism". The book, which became "the gospel of Deobandi militants" in the 1980s, attacked Khomeini and argued the excesses of the 8 Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival* (New York: Norton, 2006), p164. Islamic revolution were proof that Shiism was not the doctrine of misguided brothers, but beyond the Islamic pale. Pakistan is the only Sunni majority country where Shias have been elected to top offices and played an important part in the country's history and nation building. The founder of Pakistan Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Muhammad Ali Bogra and the Bhutto family are Shia Muslims, as is Asif Ali Zardari, Abida Hussain, Faisal Saleh Hayat and several other top ranking Pakistani Politicians and Generals such as Yahya Khan, Musa Khan and

Iskander Mirza. Jihad in Kashmir: Pakistan's support and involvement in Kashmir was also responsible for sectarian violence. While the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Hizbul Mujahideen do not indulge in sectarian violence inside Pakistan, the same cannot be said about other jihadi groups, especially the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and, its later incarnation, the Jaish-e-Mohammad. Both these groups were trained in Afghanistan under the Taliban and were close to Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, the most violent Sunni organization. Before the Musharraf regime started its crackdown on sectarian organizations in 2001, these three were involved in collecting funds for jihad in Kashmir. The security agencies could not do much, as they could not differentiate which organization was involved.

Tribal Conflict in the khyber Pakhtoonkhawa : Tribal clashes between Pashtun tribes in the Northwest Frontier Province have also taken on a sectarian nature, with the Shia Orakzai tribe often battling with their Sunni neighbors. These clashes are centered around the town of Bannu, and have often turned deadly.

However, the conflict is rooted in centuries' old land disputes, and has only taken on a sectarian nature since the fanatic Taliban regime came into power in nearby Afghanistan in the 1990s.

The Madrassas: Various madrassas, especially in Punjab and Karachi, accentuated existing sectarian cleavage. Each Sunni schism (Deobandi, Brehlvi, Wahabi) and Shias ran their own madrassas for providing basic education. The curriculum was decided by the madaris. As a result, when sectarian fault lines got pronounced, a hate campaign was introduced vis-a-vis the other sect.

Besides, the madrassas also provided manpower for these sectarian organizations, leading to sectarian engagements on the streets and dividing

them further. About one-third of the 2, 50019 registered madrassas in Punjab are known to impart military training to their students, and to be directly involved in sectarian attacks. The communities started defending their faith by protecting and supporting the offenders instead of condemning their violence. This support took the form of political, personal and financial patronage, which only accentuated the cycle of violence. 19

Iqbal Quadir, "Madrassa Culture in Pakistan", HRCP Journal, Vol. 8, No. 3, Nov 1998. FAILURE OF STATE What has been clear since the beginning of this sectarian conflict in Pakistan is the complete failure of the State, from Zia's period onwards. It was unfortunate that during Zia's period in the 1980s the Turis of Kurram Agency became the pawns in Pakistan's larger game in Afghanistan. The State failed to understand Turi fears and insecurity, and has failed to understand them ever since. The emergence of the Taliban and the growth of sectarian politics in the 1990s further aggravated the situation.

Given the sensitivities the State forces should have taken extra care in preventing the movement of battle hardened Sunni Taliban with their sectarian streak into sensitive places. Unfortunately, the State was never keen in enforcing its writ in the tribal agencies. The questions of State's failure should be seen in the context of its wider historical lack of interest in maintaining its writ in the FATA. It allowed its writ to erode in the name of maintaining tribal customs and traditions. It even exploited the same customs and traditions to pursue its larger strategic interests in Afghanistan.

The Pakistani state has failed to understand that the situation has been dramatically changing over the last decade. A section within the FATA, <https://assignbuster.com/sectarianism-in-pakistan/>

especially amongst the younger generation, is highly influenced by the Taliban-al Qaeda brand of Islam, and prefers to adhere to their Islamic principles, rather than the age old secular tribal customs of the Pashtuns, referred to as Pashtunwali. Another section, within the young generation, exposed to modern education and democratic ideals, prefers the expansion of State's functions into tribal regions. Though both the above streams of youths are highly anti-American, they don't agree with how they are being governed. While the Taliban supporters prefer to be governed under Shariah, the more modernminded others want the State expand its governance process. Thus, both sections want to repeal the archaic FCR, but for different reasons. More importantly, in the above two schools of thoughts, what is also gradually eroding is the influence of elders and jirga politics.

The jirga provides a prefect excuse for the State to keep away from the problems and provides an instrument to maintain law and order. Failure of governance also provided space for other groups to express the local sentiments. While in other parts of the FATA, this expression has taken a religious (orthodox Sunni version adopted by Taliban) course, in Orakzai and Kurram, it has also assumed a sectarian nature. The influence of these sectarian organizations can be fought by the State only by expanding the governance process inside these regions.

CONCLUSION Since the late 1980s, the Shia-Sunni sectarian violence has engulfed almost the entire province of Punjab and certain parts of the North-Western Frontier Province (Khyber pakhtoonkhawa). Though sectarian conflict is not a new phenomenon, the scope, intensity and the continuity of the ongoing violent phase are unprecedented in the history of Pakistan.

Jhang in Punjab province was the first district to fall prey to the increased and persistent nature of sectarian violence in the 1980s.

The Shia-Sunni sectarian conflict cannot be explained in religious and ideological terms alone; notwithstanding the fact that the religious and sectarian idiom is frequently used by religious leaders from the pulpit to encourage violence, mobilize their followers and achieve political goals. In the context of sectarian violence, the local contextual realities have been of critical significance. The external stimuli might have played some catalyst role in terms of triggering off and accelerating the process of shift from the dormant sectarian conflict to the violent one.

But what is important to note is that the potency of external stimuli and the nature of reaction they might provoke are determined at the local levels. The likelihood of a shift from dormant to violent conflict, however, increases if the institutional and legal structures in a given state fail to adjust and accommodate to the changing socio-economic realities and/or lack capacity to effectively respond and check the external stimuli. Shia-Sunni conflict is primarily a manifestation of the socio-economic changes at the grassroots level, which have given rise to political tensions among different classes of society.

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